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Aussie women to get metal breast implants

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BREAST implants laced with metal will be implanted in thousands of Australian women in a world-first trial aimed at reducing cases of breast job hardening and deformity.

More than 10,000 Australian women have breast augmentations every year – the second most popular cosmetic surgery after liposuction.

However, about seven per cent of these women will suffer from an unnatural tightening where the breast becomes overly firm, and sometimes distorted and painful.

Cosmetic surgeons have started to recruit 3000 Australian women nationwide to test out a European-made titanium implant they believe will have lower rates of so-called capsular contracture.

Study leader Daniel Fleming told the national conference of cosmetic medicine in Melbourne today initial results from the first 80 patients implanted since November were very positive, with only one case of the complication reported.

"Capsular contracture is a significant problem in the industry and it's one we've had difficulty solving so it's exciting to try to find new ways to avoid it," said Dr Fleming, soon to become president of the Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery.

The complication arises when breast tissue surrounding the implant reacts by contracting and squashing the implant, making it hard and scrunching up the breast.

Some patients get just moderate firming while in the worst cases the pouch becomes rock hard and painful, requiring corrective surgery.

A French implant company has tried to negate the problem by modifying their standard silicone gel implants and coating them in an invisible, microscopic layer of titanium, a naturally-occurring metal also used in hip replacements and bone screws.

"The idea is when we put a titanium implant inside a patient the body sees the titanium, not the silicon, and it won't react, but we don't know if this is completely the case yet," Dr Fleming said.

"We do know it won't interfere with mammograms or airport scanners though."

He said half the women offered the titanium implant had taken up the option, with the rest preferring the standard filler. It would be a year before more detailed results would be available.

The presentation was one of several where cosmetic surgeons discussed the latest surgical trends in breast augmentations, how to operate on difficult breasts and the best ways to avoid gel leaks, displacement and other problems.