

It's Breast Cancer Awareness Month!

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Power Through Early Detection & Knowledge

At the age of 16 I learned that my family carried the BRCA2 genetic mutation. This meant that I had a 50% chance of being a carrier since my Mom & Aunt had tested positive. Two years later, at the age of 18, I decided to get tested. I too tested positive and would later learn that my two younger sisters also carried the mutation.

The BRCA2 mutation indicates a high risk for breast cancer (87%) and heightened risk for ovarian cancer (52%). Of course, it is scary when those numbers are staring you in the face. But, within that daunting knowledge, I have also found gratitude in knowing that I have a warning sign; a warning sign that allows me increased and regular imaging to monitor my risk and aid in early detection if that 13% doesn't work out. I also have the power to stay ahead of my chances and opt for preventative actions. A prophylactic double mastectomy would reduce my risk for breast cancer to 2%. With that said, that is a very personal decision that requires a thoughtful process with multiple considerations. One might argue that they are only breasts ... They are a woman's most outward sign of femininity, a defining physical attribute that some of us struggle to love for so long and eventually soften to. A Life-providing tool from mother to infant and a part of the body that holds sexual weight for many of us. Therefore, being such a sensitive & emotional journey, there should be no judgement for any decision that is not the same as our own.

I watched my Mom go through her journey with breast cancer and a double mastectomy. She was fortunate that her diagnosis was caught in the very early stages of the illness. Early detection played an impactful role for her. Regardless, she made the emotional decision to have a double mastectomy with reconstruction. Now cancer-free, this decision is still part of her daily journey. She is grateful for her good health and positive outcome. Until you go through this, or you've supported someone going through it, you can never understand the emotional weight that a decision like this carries. To this day, she swears that it was the hardest thing she has ever done.

Through my mom's journey, I have been granted much more consideration than most. I am still trying to decide if I will have a preventative surgery. Although cancer waits for no one, I want to ensure my own graciousness in the process. I am lucky to have such a supportive partner who stands by me & loves no matter what I decide. In the meantime, I plan to continue my imaging every six months, advocate for myself within the healthcare system when needed, and remain positive & calm no matter what is thrown my way. Early detection and awareness are so very important. I hope my story can help someone else somehow.

Allison S.



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