

## My name is Trisha and I have risky genes

My story is a long one, but thankfully, it has a happy ending for me. Breast and Ovarian Cancer had always run strong in my family, with a long list of second cousins, great aunts, and my great grandmother all passing away from breast or ovarian cancer. As a teen I chose to ignore this but by 25 I was forced to face its reality when my mother was diagnosed with stage 2B breast cancer at the age of 45. At this time my sister was 17 and my brother only 6 years old. During my mom's 16 rounds of chemotherapy, 13 rounds of Herceptin, double mastectomy with reconstruction, hysterectomy and oophorectomy she underwent genetic testing revealing she was BRCA2 positive. She explained to me the risks of this genetic mutation and the 50% chance that I too may be BRCA2 positive. I decided it was necessary to have the testing done myself.



By 26, it was confirmed I too carry the BRCA2 genetic mutation, news bringing me closer to a deadly disease. The next step for me was pre-screening with my first mammogram and a referral to a plastic surgeon for more information on surgical preventative options.

Come mammogram day, the professionals advised me of abnormalities showing in my right breast, I was then sent for a closer look through ultra sound. There was indeed something abnormal and I was later sent for a biopsy. I waited weeks in suspense for potentially life altering results. During this time, I had thought more about preventative surgery, deciding if I was lucky enough to receive a cancer free result it's a precaution I should take, this biopsy was enough to scare me into courage. Finally the results came back, non-cancerous!

I then met with my plastic surgeon thinking surgery was a faraway concept due to long waiting periods, time I was going to take to come to terms with my decision. To my surprise, after the consultation I was advised I could start my journey in just three months. This immediately brought me to tears, was I ready?? Thinking about everything my mom had gone through I felt I had an opportunity to take control of the situation and decided to proceed with prevention.

My journey started with three surgeries, the first June of 2015, a "bilateral breast delay of nipple areola complex". Meaning an incision detaching the internal breast tissue from the nipple, allowing the body to develop better blood flow to the nipple through the skin versus the tissue that was soon to be removed. My second surgery took place late June of 2015,

where they completed a “bilateral breast mastectomy with immediate Alloderm assisted breast reconstruction and insertion of tissue expanders”. This surgery was the removal of my breast tissue and lifting of the chest muscle for placement of expanders. The expanders were then filled with fluid every couple of weeks by inserting a needle through the chest into the expander. At this point there was minimum feeling so it wasn’t as bad as it sounds. Although stretching of the chest muscle was where the pain took place for me. After about six months of this, I was “medically ready” for my third procedure. January of 2016 I proceeded with a “bilateral chest wall removal of tissue expanders and insertion cohesive silicone gel implants”.

Over the years more of our immediate family became known BRCA2 carriers through testing. October 2014, my grandfather was diagnosed with a very aggressive prostate cancer, becoming stage 4 after it metastasizing in his bones, bladder and liver, later taking his life September of 2017.

My Aunt (mom’s sister) was also found to be a BRCA2 carrier October of 2015. At the time she made the decision to opt out of preventative surgical measures given its invasive nature and the healthy lifestyle she was already living, but unfortunately this was not enough to stop cancer; in April of 2018 she was diagnosed with stage 1A breast cancer and proceeded with a double mastectomy and reconstruction. Luckily, the cancer was caught early and no chemo or radiation was required.

In 2017 our family was very pleased to discovery my sister does not have the BRCA2 gene that plagues our family, finally a win and peace of mind that she will not be passing this on to her young son.

As of late, my last surgery took place January of 2020. I was not 100% happy with the ripples and divots that can commonly occur in reconstruction so my surgeon proceeded with fat grafting from my thighs and stomach and replaced the implants all together with a better shape for my body type. As a young female, I am feeling much more confident with these results.

One more surgery is recommended for me, between the ages 30-35, a hysterectomy. As I have not yet started my family this is something I have put on the back burner for now.

I am happy to have come out of these surgeries with no real complications and peace of mind that my breasts no longer threaten my life. I am happy to live in a country that gave me the opportunity to take a harmful situation into my own hands. Additionally I am thankful for the support I received from family and dear friends. And, I am so happy mom was there to help me through the journey and even more thankful I still have her with me today.

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