

## Prophylactic Mastectomy

If you choose to have a mastectomy before any sign of cancer is found, this is called a prophylactic (or preventive) mastectomy. Factors such as your family history, personal medical history and genetic makeup will determine your level of risk. Understanding your risk level and discussing that with your doctor will help you appreciate risk-reducing strategies, including prophylactic mastectomy.

All women carry a risk of breast cancer, particularly as they grow older. However, certain factors can increase your risk and may make you a candidate for prophylactic mastectomy. These factors may include but are not limited to the following:

- **You've already had a cancer in one breast.** If you have a family history of breast cancer and have developed cancer in only one of your breasts, you may opt to have both breasts removed. In this case, one breast is removed to expel the cancer and the other, unaffected breast, is removed to reduce the development of breast cancer in it.
- **You have a family history of breast cancer.** If two or more members of your family have developed breast cancer at a relatively young age (under age 50 or in their premenopausal years), you have a significant family history that puts you at risk for breast cancer. This predisposition could come from either your mother's, or father's, side of the family. With this family history, some studies have shown a prophylactic mastectomy could reduce your risk by as much as 90%.<sup>1</sup>
- **You have tested positive for the hereditary gene.** If genetic testing shows a mutation in genes associated with breast cancer (BRCA1 or BRCA2), you have a 40% to 85% chance of developing breast cancer by age 70. With this type of result from genetic testing, a prophylactic mastectomy could greatly reduce your risk.<sup>2</sup>
- **You have found early signs of breast cancer.** One of the early signs of breast cancer is precancerous, or abnormal cells present in the milk producing glands (the lobules) of your breast (a condition called lobular carcinoma in situ). These are not cancerous, but can indicate an increased risk of developing breast cancer in your lifetime.<sup>3</sup>
- **You have not had a child.** There is evidence to suggest that not having children may increase your risk of developing breast cancer.<sup>4</sup>
- **You have had children later in life.** There is evidence to suggest that waiting to have children places you at a higher risk than someone who has decided to have children at an earlier age.<sup>5</sup>

1. *Prophylactic Mastectomy.* [www.breastreconstruction.org](http://www.breastreconstruction.org). August 13, 2008.

2. *Breast/Ovarian Cancer: BRCA1 & BRCA2.* [www.mskcc.org](http://www.mskcc.org). January 5, 2009.

3. *Prophylactic mastectomy: Breast cancer prevention for high-risk women.* [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com). November 30, 2007.

4. *Pregnancy and Breast Cancer Risk.* [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov). April 30, 2008.

5. *Pregnancy and Breast Cancer Risk.* [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov). April 30, 2008.

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Important Information: Every patient is different and their reconstruction options and their results may vary. All depictions on the site are for illustration purposes only. Whether or not you have breast reconstruction is a decision you need to make in consultation with your physician. Only you and your physician can determine the best option for you. Please ask your doctor to explain the benefits and risk of various reconstruction options and whether they are right for you.

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