

Becky's story

At the age of 24 and with a family history of breast cancer, Becky was the youngest person in Britain to undergo preventative surgery before being diagnosed. Now, she is living life to the full bringing up her two young children, supporting other families with hereditary breast cancer.

My family has a history of breast cancer. In the early 90s, my mum discovered that over the generations it had been the cause of death of 14 of our female relatives. Mum opted to have her breasts removed before she got cancer and has been the inspiration for the way I've approached things.

I'd always thought I might have the gene – my mum having BRCA1 mutation meant there was a 50.50 chance. I'd imagined that I'd get tested for the gene in my late 20s, but when my cousin Helen was diagnosed with breast cancer at 29, I decided I needed to take action much sooner.

Luckily after a double mastectomy Helen recovered, but the experience had a big impact on me. As a family we seemed to be getting breast cancer earlier over the generations.

In 2004, I made an appointment with Professor Gareth Evans (the same consultant who had looked after my mum) at Saint Mary's Hospital and decided to take the BRCA test. I felt that the longer I left it, the more I would worry about it. I was working as a presenter on a local radio station at the time. I took the opportunity to share my experiences to raise awareness of breast cancer. It was surprising how many other people affected called in to offer their support.

I knew that if I had the gene, there could be an 85% chance of me getting breast cancer. And, I always thought that having preventative surgery before getting cancer would be what I would choose to do. Every woman in my family had ended up with breast cancer unless they'd had preventative surgery. I admired Helen's courage in fighting her illness, but knew didn't have the strength to go through what Helen had.

It really came as no surprise when Gareth told me I'd tested positive.

But, having the test result gave me information to help make a decision. I had a choice to potentially add tens-of-years to my life and there was no way I was going to wait until I got breast cancer. I felt that it would be selfish not to consider preventative surgery.

My breasts could kill me. I realised that if I didn't do this, I might not be able to have the life that I want to have for myself.

I had preventative surgery at Wythenshawe Hospital in 2006, followed by immediate breast reconstruction. My family and partner Alex have been so supportive. It really helped having family members who were at different

stages of the same condition to talk to.

One thing I'd say to other women is that men aren't as bothered about boobs as you think they are. If you love each other, it's the person inside that matters. I also received lots of support from staff at the hospitals to help me arrive at my decision.

The other thing that concerned me was that having the BRCA1 gene mutation puts me at higher risk of ovarian cancer. We really wanted a family. Thankfully we now have a little girl Eva-May who's four and I gave birth to our son Bobby five months ago. It's been a harrowing time weighing up our desire for a family and when to have a hysterectomy to reduce my risk of ovarian cancer. With Bobby our family is complete and I'm planning to have the surgery soon.

The women in my family have had to be strong to survive cancer. My family history was used to help researchers to find the BRCA gene, and I have been helping my mum to manage the [National Hereditary Breast Cancer Helpline](#) (01629 813000; available 24 hours) which she founded in 1996 and we hope our experiences are helping others.

When they find that they have the BRCA1/2 gene mutation many women fear that they have to take action immediately. The new 18SNP test will give women more options and help them to make a more informed decision.

[Find out more about the new 18SNP test developed in Manchester, which helps to more accurately predict breast cancer risk in women with a family history of breast cancer.](#)

Further information about research into cancer prevention and early detection in Manchester is available on the [NIHR Manchester Biomedical Research Centre website](#).