



BREAST CANCER IN YOUNG WOMEN

Whether you're 25 or 75, a diagnosis can be devastating. But women under 40 often face unique issues when it comes to the disease. What to know:

✓ IT'S MUCH LESS COMMON

Only one in 2,500 women will get a diagnosis in her 20s, one in 250 in her 30s, and one in 70 in her 40s, says Ann Partridge, M.D., director of the young women's program at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. In other words, your risk rises with age.

✓ IT CAN BE MORE DEADLY

"Young women are more prone to get an aggressive type of breast cancer and be diagnosed at a later stage," says Partridge. "Because of this, they're more likely to die of the disease." This may be because some breast cancers diagnosed in younger women have genetic traits that make them faster-growing and less responsive to treatment, according to a new study from the Duke Comprehensive Cancer Center and the Duke Institute for Genome Sciences & Policy.

✓ IT MAY BE MORE EMOTIONALLY DEVASTATING

"Breast cancer is a greater threat to the personal lives of younger women," says Partridge. "They're less likely to have completed their families, and treatment can compromise fertility," so worries about not being able to have children can add to the trauma. With fewer life experiences under their belt, they may also be less resilient, she says. "Plus, they face the stress of such issues as, 'How am I going to get a date again without a breast?'"

✓ **THERE ARE RESOURCES TO TURN TO** "Boston's Dana Farber has a unique program for younger women," says Partridge, as do a few other hospitals. She also recommends contacting the Young Survival Coalition (youngsurvival.org), as well as local chapters of Susan G. Komen for the Cure (komen.org).



Nine years later, Mevlana says her life rocks

"It made me reevaluate my life."

—ASHA MEVLANA

In January 1999, just seven months after graduating from college, Asha Mevlana found a lump in her breast. Busy with a new job in public relations and adjusting to life in New York City, she ignored it. Her mother, however, kept urging her to get it checked out. So she had a mammogram in June, but it was inconclusive. Finally, in December, she got around to having an ultrasound and biopsy—the latter of which revealed that Mevlana had estrogen-receptor-positive cancer. "I put my head in my hands and sobbed," says the now-32-year-old. "I was certain it had spread."

The very next day, Mevlana had a lumpectomy in her left breast. Thankfully, her lymph nodes were clean, but her doctors agreed she needed to undergo chemo and then two months of daily radiation. Frightened by the prospect, Mevlana knew she couldn't do it alone. But her friends were young and had never experienced anything similar, so she had to try "to be really open about everything," she says. Mevlana even started a blog (ashamevlana.com) that detailed her progress.

Though the experience was grueling, Mevlana feels that having breast cancer gave her perspective. "It reminded me how valuable our time here is and it made me reevaluate my life." After completing treatment, she decided to follow her passion and pursue a career in music. She quit her job and began taking rock violin lessons and joined several bands—all the while supporting herself by teaching music to children.

In 2004, she took the plunge and moved to Los Angeles. "I knew no one in the industry, so I had to start at the beginning and work my way up." Since then, she's played with Jay-Z, Mary J. Blige, and Gnarlz Barkley. This month, her band, Porcelain, is releasing its first album, *Freedom and Release*. "It hasn't been easy, but I never would have had the courage to take it this far if I hadn't had breast cancer."

WHAT SHE WANTS YOU TO KNOW Let your loved ones in. "Though it was hard for me to relinquish control, I started allowing people to take care of me—making me food, doing my laundry, coming to my chemo sessions, and going wig shopping with me," says Mevlana. "And I quickly realized that helping me was helping them too."