

Script – Broadcast – Cancer diagnosis – “All part of a bigger plan”

INTRO

Terri Odell has never had any health problems. The Rockford, Illinois native attributes her good fortune to leading an active lifestyle that started when she was a young child and continued into adulthood – working out, running marathons and owning a personal training business. When she found a lump in her breast in December 2023, the 63-year-old Odell was stunned.

((SOT))

Terri Odell, breast cancer survivor

“That's the hardest thing for me but also the biggest benefit for me,” she says. “I know that my body's very strong, and it's extremely healthy, except for that little bit of cancer that's moving through it. But it does make me feel a lot more secure that everything's going to be OK. And that's a big part of getting better is to believe in it and to keep yourself going.” (:27)

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Cancer is no stranger to Odell's family. Her mother passed away from ovarian cancer when Odell was three years old. Odell, who had seven siblings, lost two sisters to lung cancer, and she has an aunt and cousin who've battled ductal carcinoma. The fear of cancer was always in the back of Odell's mind.

Her lump turned out to be triple negative breast cancer, which is a cancer of the breast that does not have hormone receptors, such as estrogen and progesterone, that are found in most breast cancers. Triple negative breast cancer is usually diagnosed in women younger than 45. Now, Odell is spreading the important message of genetic testing. And no better time than the present. October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Odell carries the BRCA1 gene, which increases the risk for ovarian cancer. It turns out that Odell had a tumor in her fallopian tube, so she had oophorectomy, which is surgery to remove one or both ovaries. “BRCA” stands for “BREast CANcer gene.” BRCA1 and BRCA2 are two different genes that have been found to impact a person's chances of developing breast cancer. Odell had a lumpectomy to remove the cancerous tumor in her breast.

Peggy Rogers, a nurse practitioner in genetics and medical oncology for OSF HealthCare, says women will often consider having a mastectomy on the affected breast or bilateral mastectomy to remove both breasts and reduce the elevated risk of a potential second breast cancer.

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Peggy Rogers, a nurse practitioner in genetics and medical oncology for OSF HealthCare

“If they don't have breast cancer, but they're diagnosed with the BRCA1 gene, we put them on heightened surveillance with a mammogram, alternating with a breast MRI every six months.” (:13)

Rogers says if a person tests positive for a pathogenic variant in BRCA, she should inform all her first-degree relatives, including children, because there's a 50/50 chance they could inherit the gene, but it's also important to share the information with other family members on the affected side of the family.

As for Odell, she remains optimistic that better days are ahead. She's still training her clients and continuing to push herself with her own rigorous workouts. And she's spreading the word about prevention and genetic testing. In fact, most of her surviving siblings have now been tested. Odell says there will be no more surprises in her family when it comes to cancer. For more information on genetic testing, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).