

## Kicking cancer

Karen Floyd's heartfelt reflections on the loss of her mother to breast cancer and her own lifelong struggle with such fears highlight several important points. Unlike almost any other diagnosis, breast cancer has two immediate associations: fear of cancer and having one's life cut short, and fear of disfigurement.

Angelina Jolie's decision is about empowerment. Accurate information empowers all patients. Bilateral prophylactic mastectomies reduce a woman's risk of developing breast cancer by 95 to 98 percent. The chances of living a full life are higher than if one never had breast cancer.

Not all women undergoing such surgery are BRCA1 or BRCA2 positive. Some have a strong family history without carrying the gene mutation.

Others may have breasts that are difficult to examine by physical examination alone or with standard mammograms. While this choice seems radical, it can be life saving and life altering for that small group of women who might benefit from it.

Today's reconstructive options are highly advanced, almost always available in the immediate setting, usually in one stage at the time of the mastectomy, and can leave a woman feeling proud of her figure and emotionally relieved of worry and fear.

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