

A SURVIVOR'S STORY

Olivia Newton-John opens up to *OK!* about her victory over breast cancer

ROCKING ON...



MELISSA ETHERIDGE
Diagnosed with breast cancer at age 43, this rocker (now 45) didn't let the disease slow her down.

SHERYL CROW
This singer, 44, is now touring after undergoing treatment for breast cancer in February.



KYLIE MINOGUE
The pop star, 38, is going back on tour after being treated for breast cancer last year.

When Australian singer and actress Olivia Newton-John found a suspicious lump in her breast, she immediately went to her doctor to get an exam. The results of her mammogram and needle biopsy came back normal, which should have been reason to breathe a sigh of relief. But Olivia, then in her early 40s, was not satisfied. "I didn't feel right, and both my surgeon and I had an instinct about it, so he said he wanted to do a surgical biopsy," Olivia tells *OK!* The surgical biopsy revealed what Olivia suspected — that she had breast cancer. "That's why I always say to women that if you have an instinct, pursue that."

Olivia's instinct was remarkable, however, because she was not a likely candidate for breast cancer. "I was very healthy," she says. "I always ate well, always exercised, hardly drank, never smoked." But instead of asking, "Why me?" Olivia dealt with the situation head-on. "I just wanted to get through it the best that I could. I had a young child and that's really all that mat-

tered to me — that I would be healthy and live through it to be here for her," says Olivia. More tests determined that the cancer had not spread beyond her breast, and Olivia's doctors recommended surgery (a modified radical mastectomy) and chemotherapy. "I was obviously frightened at first," says Olivia. "Once I knew it was isolated and it could be treated... I was quite happy with what they suggested." But the chemotherapy was not easy. To help her get through it, Olivia sang and wrote music. "Music for me is very healing — particularly singing it — because it is like a release for me," says Olivia. "Creating it really was healthy." Fortunately, Olivia's treatment — and her strong spirit, no doubt — ultimately wiped out the cancer. Olivia, now 58, has been cancer-free ever since.

A little more than five years after her diagnosis, Olivia began getting involved in breast cancer awareness. "I waited a few years because I wanted to make sure that I was over the five-year mark," she says. Since then she has been one of the loudest and most beautiful voices of breast cancer awareness. Most recently, she partnered with the Y-ME National Breast Cancer Organization to create the Olivia Breast Self-Exam Kit. She is also raising money to build the Olivia Newton-John Cancer Centre in her hometown of Melbourne, Australia (for more information, visit oliviaappeal.com). Last but not certainly not least, Olivia has just released a CD called *Grace and Gratitude*, which she hopes will be soothing to others in much the same way that music has been soothing to her. "I believe very strongly in the powerful connection between body, heart and spirit," says Olivia. "This CD shares music that hopefully inspires healing in others." **OK!**

KNOW THE RISK FACTORS

"There is no such thing as prevention when it comes to breast cancer; we prefer to call it risk reduction," says Dr. Ernie Bodai, director of breast surgical services at Kaiser Permanente in Sacramento, Calif. To that end, it's important to understand the major risk factors for breast cancer. They include:

- Age (the older you are, the greater your risk)
- Family history of the disease
- Having gotten your period young or hit menopause at a later age (the longer you've had high levels of reproductive hormones in

your body over your lifetime, the greater your breast cancer risk)

- A previous biopsy showing atypical cells
 - Having your first child after 30 or having no children
 - Obesity (fatty tissues store estrogen, which ups breast cancer risk)
 - Long-term use of hormone replacement therapy or hormonal birth control
- Talk with your doctor about your personal risk factors. You can also calculate your risk by logging onto cancer.gov/bcrisktool.



'It was a breast self-exam that saved my life'

ASK RACHEL



Our health director answers your top questions

Q How can I protect myself from getting breast cancer?

A As you can see in the box at left, there are many risk factors over which we have no control. But you can and should focus on the ones you can influence. For instance, eat a healthy diet and exercise, says Dr. Lisa Curcio, a surgical oncologist at Advanced Breast Care Specialists of Orange County in California. "More and more data shows that maintaining a healthy weight plays a role in risk." Also, ask your doctor about your birth control options. For most women, the benefits of the pill (protection against pregnancy and ovarian cancer) outweigh the risk (increased likelihood of breast cancer). But if you're already at increased risk for breast cancer, think about alternative birth control. And, of course, do monthly breast self-exams, see your ob-gyn regularly and get a yearly mammogram starting at age 40 (earlier if you're at increased risk).

Q Which products donate some of their proceeds to breast cancer research?

- A**
- 1. American Breast Cancer Research Stamp** This stamp, brought to market by Dr. Ernie Bodai, has raised more than \$57 million. Find it at your local post office or at curebreastcancer.org (\$9 for 20 stamps).
 - 2. Olivia Breast Self-Exam Kit** (\$22, Walgreens)
 - 3. Gulten Dye Earrings** (\$20, gultendye.com)



Another way you can help support the cause is to join a breast cancer walk. Check out avonwalk.org, komen.org or cityofhope/walkforhope.com.

IF YOU HAVE A HEALTH OR FITNESS QUESTION, e-mail askrachel@ok-magazine.com OR WRITE TO: ASK RACHEL, OKI MAGAZINE, 475 5TH AVE., NEW YORK, NY 10017

These answers are not intended to substitute for individual professional care.