

WEST SUBURBS

99.1 The Mix host Elizabeth Kay has a near 60% chance of developing breast cancer. She's taking 'proactive' measures to prevent it.

**Cathy Kozlowicz**

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Elizabeth Kay has always used her platform for good.

As morning co-host on 99.1 The Mix (WMYX-FM) in Milwaukee since 2009, Kay has addressed many issues, including family, relationships, funny and sentimental life moments and other topics her listeners can relate to and learn from.

Now, she hopes her summer life update announcement posted on The Mix website will save lives.

Because 13% of women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, according to the National Cancer Institute, Kay, who lives in Waukesha County, said she will do anything so no one else has to go through it.

That's why on July 11, Kay, 41, is scheduled for a bilateral mastectomy, a surgical removal of both breasts, she announced.

Later this year, she will have reconstructive surgery. She will then have her fallopian tubes and ovaries removed.

No, she does not have breast or any kind of cancer, she said.

But she has the BRCA2 gene mutation, a breast cancer gene, she learned earlier this year. Kay's preventive surgery is similar to the surgery Angelina Jolie had in 2013 when Jolie had the BRCA1 gene mutation, another breast cancer gene.

"The main message is to be proactive when it comes to your health," Kay emphasized to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel as to why she is sharing her story.

"Breast cancer sucks," she said in her announcement.

The reason for her surgery is straightforward. She does not want her family, friends and 99.1 family to see her go through cancer.

"Screw you cancer, I am not letting you get to me."

Elizabeth Kay's chances of getting breast cancer without the preventive surgery

In the last few years, Kay said some of her family members got diagnosed with breast cancer, and she became concerned about it being hereditary. She also said she has dense breasts which she said already puts her at a higher risk.

Earlier this year, Kay learned that with her *BRCA2* gene mutation, she has a 58% chance of getting breast cancer and a 20% chance of getting ovarian cancer. "Those are horrible numbers," she said in her life update announcement.

According to the National Cancer Institute, 45% to 69% of women who inherit the *BRCA2* variant will develop breast cancer by age 70–80, and 11% to 17% will develop ovarian cancer by that age.

"It is huge, life changing surgery," Kay said to the Journal Sentinel. She said she will be taking about three weeks off work to recover from her bilateral mastectomy; the removal of her fallopian tubes and ovaries will put her in immediate menopause.

"Once I knew what my risks were, I did not hesitate to make these preventative measures," she said.

Her family members who were diagnosed with breast cancer also have this gene, Kay said. Since she does not have biological children, she said the gene "stops with me."

Kay said her family members who were diagnosed with breast cancer are her "heroes," as she has their "blessings" to speak publicly about this, she said.

"They said they wish they knew (about the gene)."

Who is considered high risk for breast cancer?

Dr. Kelli Pettit, breast surgeon and director of breast cancer surgical services at the UW Health Cancer Center at ProHealth Care, where Kay is being treated, said in an email that the chances of developing breast cancer increase with genetics and family history, breast density, history of abnormal breast biopsies, previous radiation to the chest and lifestyle.

Nikki Panico, Susan G. Komen's state executive director, stressed that despite hereditary factors, it is important to learn and understand breast cancer and do everything to be preventive. She said through her job she has talked to many people who were diagnosed with breast cancer who said they have "no family history."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 5% to 10% of breast cancers and 10% to 15% of ovarian cancers are hereditary.

The preventive measures, Panico said, include discussing family history with a doctor, going to a doctor if anything feels not right or if there is pain, having mammograms and doing self-examinations.

What does the program for people at high-risk for breast cancer do?

The high-risk program at ProHealth Care has comprehensive assessments, counseling and prevention access to dietitians and genetic counselors and high-risk screening which includes immediate results for mammography screening and fast MRI screening, said Pettit.

"All ProHealth Care patients receiving mammograms are screened for an elevation in their risk of breast cancer. They are given this information at the time of their mammogram, and it is included in their medical record. Women should consult their health care provider about additional screening or prevention, including the possibility of more individualized care within our high-risk clinic," Pettit added.

Dr. Christopher Hake, the hematologist and medical oncologist who leads the cancer genetic risk assessment program at the UW Health Cancer Center at ProHealth Care, said in an email to the Journal Sentinel that the team at the center works with individuals "who may have a predisposition for cancer to help prevent and detect cancer early."

What does genetic counseling and testing do?

Hake said a genetic counselor works with the person to review family medical history and talk about genetics, cancer risk and any potential emotional aspects of test results. A genetic counselor can discuss whether to pursue genetic testing, he said.

"Genetic testing can reveal whether you carry a gene mutation that makes it more likely you'll develop certain diseases, not whether you will get cancer. Your test results help you understand your risks and work with your doctor," he said. He added that based on these test results, the cancer genetics team may create a customized screening program, offer dietary and lifestyle recommendations to reduce cancer risks and help with more targeted options.

"Our goal is to help you reduce the risk as much as possible," he said.

Who should consider genetic testing for cancer?

Hake said people can benefit from genetic testing if one has a family member who has had a rare cancer, a cancer diagnosis at a relatively young age, more than one type of cancer, a gene mutation or multiple family members with cancer. More criteria are listed through the National Comprehensive Cancer Network at www.cancer.gov.

Hake added the cost of genetic testing has significantly decreased in recent years. "Testing may even be available at no charge to additional family members if a gene mutation is found," he said.

Panico added that men can also be carriers of the breast cancer genes, and that she learned of some through her work at Susan G. Komen.

Pettit said that preventive surgeries have been done for years, but the concept has evolved over time. She said that the BRCA2 gene mutation also can cause ovarian and fallopian tube cancer, so patients, like Kay, often chose to have their ovaries and fallopian tubes removed. Most people who elect for this surgery range from about 30 to 65 years old, she said.

"Nationally, the number of surgeries is increasing, likely due to more reconstruction options and more prevalent genetic testing," she said. "Preventive surgery gives patients control over their genetics. Even if they have a gene mutation, there is something they can do to help prevent cancer."

Sharing stories is 'powerful and lifesaving,' said Kay

Survivors and people speaking about preventive surgeries for breast and ovarian cancer, said Kay, is "powerful and lifesaving," and she finds them an "inspiration."

She also said she is thrilled that Susan G. Komen has partnered with WMYX-FM and the other Audacy Milwaukee stations, 1250AM The Fan (WSSP-AM), 103.7 Kiss FM (WXSS-FM) and Hot 105.7 (WXSS-HD2), to do a "One in Eight" segment series which started this month.

According to a news release, this program spotlights that one in eight women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime; the segment will occur on the 8th, 18th and 28th day of each month.

Through these stations, there will be stories featuring local breast cancer survivors, patients and experts to highlight personal breast cancer risks, the need for research funding, the needs of the breast cancer community and promoting healthy lifestyle behaviors.

Kay said she anticipates her surgeries will be "challenging," but she is confident that with the support system and by being able to share her story with updates on WMYX-FM's website, she will get through it.

"I am choosing life."

Kay said she will be posting updates at the WMYX-FM (99.1) website at www.audacy.com/991themix. She also said people can reach out to her through social media at www.facebook.com/elizabethkayradio, twitter.com/ElizabethKayFM and www.instagram.com/MsElizabethKay.

How do you go about being tested?

Kay said when some of her family members were getting diagnosed with breast cancer, she first talked with her primary doctor.

Panico added that, in general, one's primary doctor is a starting point.

Kay said that ProHealth Care has a high-risk breast cancer program that helped her.

It is important to know your family history, emphasized Panico.

Hake said that anyone who has reason to believe they might be at high risk can schedule an appointment with a genetics professional, at 262-696-0836 to become informed about risk

assessment and next steps.

For more information about breast cancer

For more information about the high-risk cancer services at the UW Health Cancer Center at ProHealth Care in Pewaukee and about genetic counseling, call 262-928-3000 and choose option 5 or visit bit.ly/bcgenetics.

For more information on Susan G. Komen, visit www.komen.org. To contact the helpline, call 1-877-GO KOMEN or email helpline@komen.org.

For information about Susan G. Komen Milwaukee-area events

The Susan G. Komen Women's Ride (registration is at 8:30 a.m. and the ride begins at 10 a.m.) is on July 15 at the Harley-Davidson Museum, 400 W. Canal St. in Milwaukee. The ride ends at the House of Harley, 6221 W. Layton Ave. in Greenfield.

The 2023 Komen Southeast Wisconsin More Than Pink Walk is Sept. 24. The gates open at 7:30 a.m. and the opening ceremony begins at 9 a.m. at Henry Maier Festival Park, 200 N. Harbor Drive.

To register for these events, visit www.komen.org/community/wisconsin/#local-events.

More: 99.1 The Mix host Elizabeth Kay in Milwaukee is donating her kidney to help save her mother-in-law's life

More: She had a 2% chance of surviving cancer. She's now a college graduate and set to embark on an art career

Cathy Kozlowicz can be reached at 262-361-9132 or cathy.kozlowicz@jrn.com. Follow her on Twitter at [@kozlowicz_cathy](https://twitter.com/kozlowicz_cathy).

