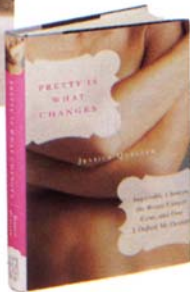




Queller's mother's experience with cancer inspired her daughter to get tested.

How to prep for genetic testing

In her new book, *Pretty Is What Changes* (Spiegel & Grau), *Gossip Girl* writer-producer Jessica Queller reflects on testing positive for a mutation in BRCA1 (a breast cancer gene) and her decision to have both of her breasts removed. SELF asked



her to share the insight she most wishes she had before she took the test.

SEEK HELP FIRST Most women are encouraged to see a genetic counselor before testing, but Queller wasn't—and didn't. “A counselor can educate you about what it

means to test positive,” she says. She may even put you in contact with women who have taken the test and can offer advice.

CHECK YOUR BIOLOGICAL CLOCK Women with a mutation tend to worry most about breast cancer, but 16 to 60 percent of them may develop ovarian cancer. The best way to reduce your risk is to remove your ovaries, but Queller was 34 and single and not ready to do so. “I didn't know that taking the test would make the usual pressure to have kids more acute,” she says.

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT YOU A positive result holds meaning for all female relatives who might carry the same gene mutation. “My decision to take the test forced my sister to confront her own genetic legacy before she was ready to, but in the end, we're both happy to have the knowledge,” Queller says. Still, remember that “everyone has to make the choice for herself.” —*Olivia Ware*

