Should you be tested?

You might be at increased risk of having a BRCA gene mutation — and a candidate for BRCA gene testing — if you have:

- A personal history of breast cancer diagnosed at a young age (premenopausal), breast cancer affecting both breasts (bilateral breast cancer), or both breast and ovarian cancers
- A personal history of ovarian cancer and a close relative with ovarian cancer or premenopausal breast cancer or both
- A history of breast cancer at a young age in two or more close relatives, such as your parents, siblings and children
- A male relative with breast cancer
- A family member who has both breast and ovarian cancers
- A family member with bilateral breast cancer
- Two or more relatives with ovarian cancer

Getting help

BRCA mutations are rare; however because women who are shown to have a BRCA mutation have a higher risk of breast and ovarian cancer, it is important they have increased cancer screening, such as mammography, and consider other risk reducing methods such as regular check-ups. It is important to have genetic counselling prior to BRCA testing. You can call Breast Health UK on 0800 085 6616 FREE or visit www.breasthealthuk.com for more information

THE ANGELINA EFFECT

In 2013 Angelina Jolie published an open letter in the New York Times detailing what she called "my medical choice." Due to an extensive family history of breast and ovarian cancer and having the BRCA1 gene mutation that dramatically raises her risk of cancer, Jolie made the decision to undergo a preventive double mastectomy. "My doctors estimated that I had an 87 percent risk of breast cancer and a 50 percent risk of ovarian cancer," Jolie explained in the article, quickly adding that the risk is different in the case of each woman. "Once I knew that this was my reality, I decided to be proactive and to minimise the risk as much as I could." Since the publication of this article, Jolie has now also undergone surgery to remove her ovaries; another preventative measure used by women with a BRCA gene mutation.

Thanks to Angelina Jolie speaking out about her decision to have a preventative mastectomy, there has been a surge in women undergoing genetic tests for breast cancer, figures show. Experts say the impact of the 39-year-old actress's announcement was not only immediate, but also long-lasting. Dubbed the 'Angelina Effect,' the numbers undergoing screening increased by two and a half times compared to the same period the year before, after the star revealed she underwent a double mastectomy after testing positive for a BRCA1 gene mutation.

Many of us have followed Angelina's story closely over the last few years, with UK experts noting her as a strong female role model, respected by women across the world. "Angelina Jolie stating she has a BRCA1 mutation and going on to have a risk-reducing mastectomy – and more recently ovary removal - is likely to have had a bigger impact than other celebrity announcements, possibly due to her image as a glamorous and strong woman," says plastic surgeon and breast surgery expert Mr. Gary Ross. "This may have lessened patients' fears about a loss of sexual identity post-preventative surgery and encouraged those who had not previously engaged with health services to consider genetic testing."

The study, published in the journal Breast Cancer Research and based on figures from 21 centres, shows that many more women approached their GPs with concerns after the actress went public. Far from being women with unfounded concerns, researchers found it was women with a family history of breast cancer, which translated into appropriate referrals for testing. The 'Angelina effect' continues to be very positive, initiating national - and worldwide - dialogue about the inherited risk of breast and ovarian cancer and it also helped reduce the stigma in women who undergo mastectomy. C