

Helene Duncan, 28

Personal trainer, exercise science graduate & master's student whose breast cancer diagnosis this year came without warning, **BRISBANE**

Personal trainer, exercise science graduate and master's student, Helene Duncan, 28, Brisbane, had little reason to believe breast cancer would become part of her life in her late twenties. Healthy, active and with no known genetic predisposition to the disease, Helene never imagined she would be diagnosed with breast cancer.

In May 2026, Helene found a lump in her right breast while showering. She visited her GP, who referred her for an ultrasound and mammogram. When she arrived for imaging, she was told she was 'too young' to be considered for a mammogram. However, after the ultrasound, the radiologist immediately requested a mammogram and biopsy.



Helene was subsequently diagnosed with stage two invasive ductal carcinoma, triple-negative breast cancer. At the time, she was in her final semester of a Bachelor of Exercise Science, completing placements, working as a personal trainer, and planning her wedding.

This is Helene's story.

When I was diagnosed, I went through the stages of grief. I was in denial, thinking, 'This is not possible. I'm 28, it's ridiculous.' Then I plunged straight into anger, then denial again. I was devastated then angry, over, and over," said Helene.

"About two weeks later, once I'd completed all of the tests and appointments and things had started to settle down, I finally had a chance to catch my breath, understand what was happening to me, and find some peace with it."

Helene's diagnosis also took a heavy emotional toll on her fiancé.

"My fiancé was put through the wringer emotionally. He had crying spells too," Helene said.

For Helene, early detection played a critical role in her diagnosis.

"Early detection is so important. Because I'm young, self-checks weren't front of mind for me, especially with no known family history of the disease. I wasn't someone who did regular self-checks. I didn't think they were necessary," said Helene.

Helene was diagnosed with triple-negative breast cancer, an aggressive form of the disease that more commonly affects younger women.

"The cancer was described to me as the cells having 'switched off' the hormone receptors that breast tissue cells usually have. My cancer only responds to certain aggressive treatments. Other women can use hormone therapy to treat their breast cancer, but I can't, because mine doesn't respond to it," Helene said.

Before her diagnosis, Helene had no known risk factors for the disease. It was 'not on [her] bingo card.'

"I exercise all the time, I'm a relatively healthy person. I don't have a known family history, and I don't do any of the things that predispose you to breast cancer."

Alongside the lump, Helene says fatigue was the only other symptom she noticed.

"Fatigue was the biggest symptom, but I put it down to Uni stress. I was in my last semester, doing placements, planning a wedding, and working at the same time. I was exhausted, mentally and physically. It only made sense once I was diagnosed," said Helene.

Living with breast cancer has forced Helene to accept a new reality.

"It's like living a nightmare you can't wake up from. It's something you never think will happen to you, especially at 28. Once it happens, you're forced to face your new reality and learn how to deal with it. You take it, and you focus on what you can control," Helene said.

Speaking with others who have experienced breast cancer has given Helene comfort and understanding.

"When you talk to someone who's been through breast cancer, they have a whole different kind of empathy for you, and they give you the best advice you can get. That was such a big support to me in those first few days, when I was spiralling. Now I create breast cancer content [[@heleneduncan](#)] so other people going through it have that same support," said Helene.

For younger women, Helene says self-checks play a vital role in early detection.

"If you're young and think this doesn't apply to you, look at me. Knowing what's normal for you and doing regular self-checks matter. That's how you catch things early.

"Everyone is familiar with self-checks but few actually know how to do them properly. If you don't know how, how are you supposed to catch it early?" Helene said.

Helene hopes other women facing breast cancer know they don't have to face it alone.

"I'm so sorry we're in the worst club ever – the 'shitty titty committee.'

"The biggest thing for us is community. Keep your loved ones and your community close, because it takes a village, and they'll support you and get you through it," said Helene.

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To coordinate an interview with Helene, 28, Brisbane, please contact:

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