



DO YOU HAVE CANCER IN YOUR FAMILY?

**Cancer genetic counseling
may be helpful to you.**

Many people have at least one relative with cancer. Cancer is very common, but only 5 to 10% of people with cancer have an inherited cancer. "Inherited" refers to something that "runs in families" and may be passed down from parents to children. Genetic tests are available for some inherited cancers.

This brochure answers some common questions about inherited cancer and genetic testing. A cancer genetics specialist can discuss these issues in more detail and address other concerns. Cancer genetics specialists may include genetic counselors, genetics doctors, oncologists, and advanced practice nurses with special training in cancer genetics.

Why are some cancers inherited?

Inherited cancer is caused by a change in a gene. Genes are like recipes for the body. Genes are the instructions that our bodies use to grow and function. Genes are passed on from parents to children. Conditions caused by gene changes are also called "genetic."

Cancer is more likely to be inherited if:

- two or more blood relatives have the same type of cancer;
- cancer was diagnosed when the blood relative was 45 years of age or younger;
- a blood relative has a very rare cancer, such as male breast cancer;
- cancer develops in both breasts, both ovaries, both kidneys, both eyes, etc.;
- a single blood relative has had cancer more than once.

Do inherited cancers only happen in adults, or in certain parts of the body?

No. Inherited cancer may develop during childhood, teenage, or adult years. Inherited cancer can occur in any part of the body.

How can one tell if a cancer is inherited?

A person can have genetic counseling and perhaps have a genetic test.

What can genetics specialists tell me about cancers?

During an appointment they can discuss the information below:

- whether the cancer in a family is likely to be inherited;
- the risks for family members to develop cancer; and,
- the chance that genetic testing will be helpful for a specific family.

What is genetic testing?

Most commonly it is a blood test. People in a laboratory will test the blood to look for a change in a gene.

Does everybody who is concerned about cancer have a genetic test?

No. A genetic test is not helpful for many people. A cancer genetics specialist can help you decide whether a genetic test could be helpful for you.

If a person has a change in a cancer gene, will she or he always develop cancer?

Not always. But having a change in a cancer gene makes cancer more likely.

How can genetic counseling and perhaps genetic testing be helpful?

- Doctors may be able to offer tests to watch carefully for the cancer in the person.
- Treatment may work better when a cancer is found early.
- Lifestyle changes may lower the person's risk for developing cancer.
- Surgery may be available to reduce the chance of developing cancer.
- The person may share information about risks and testing.

What questions are asked in a genetics appointment?

- Which relatives have had cancer?
- How are they related to you?
- How old were they when they developed cancer?
- What type of cancer(s) did they have?
- Where did the cancer start in their body?
- What type of treatment did they have?
- Have they had genetic testing?
- Would those relatives share their medical records with you?
- Do relatives have other health or learning problems?



Will my insurance pay for genetics appointments and genetic testing?

Many insurance companies will cover a genetics appointment and testing that would improve a person's medical care. A referral from a primary care doctor may be needed.

How can I find a genetics specialist near me?

You can ask your healthcare provider, or contact a genetics clinic directly.

A list of genetics clinics in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington that offer cancer genetics counseling and testing is posted on the gene reviews web site: <http://www.genereviews.org>.

Other resources for locating a cancer genetics specialist:

The National Society of Genetic Counselors

www.nsgc.org
312/321-6834

National Cancer Institute

www.cancer.gov/search/genetics_services/
1-800-422-6237

GeneTests

www.genereviews.org



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