

Will I Have To Get Genetic Testing and Is It Covered?

Genetic testing is a personal choice and no one will force you to get genetic testing. Genetic testing is most often performed for individuals with an increased chance of having a hereditary cancer gene. Each patient's personal and family history is reviewed to determine if testing is appropriate. Oftentimes, a person with a personal diagnosis of cancer is the best person in a family to have genetic testing done first. Call your insurance provider to learn if your specific policy covers genetic testing.

For many families, genetic testing can be helpful. It may lead to more accurate information about an individual's risk to develop cancer. This information may be helpful for planning medical management, cancer screening, and relieving uncertainty. Genetic testing will not find a mutation in all families that are thought to have a hereditary cancer syndrome.

Will Genetic Testing Affect My Health Insurance?

Some people have concerns about the effect of genetic testing on their insurance. At this time, there are both federal and state laws that protect people from health insurance discrimination. Others are concerned about how this will make themselves and their family members feel. These issues can be discussed in detail during the genetic counseling session.

What Screening Should I Do if I Have a Family History of Breast Cancer?

For women with a higher than average risk of breast cancer, more detailed screening methods may help with earlier detection. The American Cancer Society has determined that breast MRI is a very useful exam and should be offered regularly to certain women. For women at high risk, screening with MRI and mammography may begin before age 40. Annual Breast MRI Screening is recommended in addition to mammograms for:

- Women with a BRCA mutation, or
- Women with a lifetime risk of breast cancer higher than 20% (determined by genetic counselors using family history models)

How Do I Schedule an Appointment?

An appointment with a genetics provider can be scheduled by calling the following number:

Bemidji: 218-333-5100

Bismarck: 701-323-5400

Fargo: 701-234-2448

Sioux Falls: 605-328-4677

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Genetic Counseling and Breast Cancer



What Should I Do if I Have a Family History of Breast Cancer?

While most cancer happens by chance, a small percentage of cancer is hereditary. With hereditary cancers, a gene is passed through the family that increases the risk of developing certain types of cancer. Not everyone who has one of these genes will develop cancer. However, they may still pass on this gene to their children.

What is BRCA?

The genes most often associated with hereditary breast cancer are called BRCA1 and BRCA2. Changes in these genes can increase the risk for breast, ovarian, and other types of cancer. These are the most common genes that lead to hereditary breast cancers. A woman with a BRCA gene change has up to an 80% chance of developing breast cancer within their lifetime.

What Is a Genetics Provider?

A geneticist or genetic counselor can help you understand hereditary cancer and provide you and your family with information about your cancer risk. They will:

- Review your family medical history to assess and explain your risk for cancer
- Discuss whether you are a candidate for gene testing and describe the benefits and limitations of testing
- Order the appropriate test if you choose to proceed with gene testing
- Interpret gene test results and explain what they mean for you and your family
- Discuss how to manage your cancer risk and refer you to experts for follow-up care

What if My Family Has Breast Cancer, but Does Not Have a Brca Mutation?

Some families have more cancer than one would expect by “chance” alone, yet don’t have an identifiable “hereditary mutation.” For these families, the cancer is said to be familial. In these situations, genetic counselors can help determine a woman’s lifetime risk of getting cancer, and help map out a screening plan.

Who Should See a Genetics Provider?

A cancer risk assessment consultation will be most helpful to:

- Individuals with a strong family history of cancer. This means having 2 or more close blood relatives with the same or related types of cancer (e.g. breast and ovarian; uterine and colon) especially if the cancer occurred before age 50

- Individuals diagnosed with cancer under age 50
- Individuals who have had more than 1 type of cancer or bilateral cancers (e.g. cancer in both breasts)
- Individuals with rare cancers (e.g. male breast cancer)
- Individuals from families with a known hereditary cancer syndrome
- Individuals who want to learn more about hereditary susceptibility to cancer
- Individuals who have an increased level of stress, or anxiety, about developing cancer
- Individuals with questions about their personal or family medical history
- Individuals with questions about genetics or genetic testing

Close relatives include parents, siblings, children, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, half-siblings, grandparents, and grandchildren

Is Breast Cancer Inherited?

Some breast cancer is inherited, meaning it is passed on through one’s family. It can result from changes in genes called “hereditary mutations.” These gene changes can be passed down from a mother or a father to daughters or sons. These “hereditary mutations” can cause cancer to run in some families.

