Your Next Step:
Learn About Cancer

Learn more about your risk and the answers that genetic testing can provide.

Understanding your Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer Risk

So far, you and your doctor have gathered your health and family history. This will help you choose a care plan based on your unique risk factors.

What are Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer Syndromes?

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women in the United States. It affects about 1 in 8 women. Ovarian cancer affects about 1 in 71 women. Hereditary breast-ovarian cancer syndromes (HBOC) increase risk for breast and ovarian cancer in families.

Your health and family history shows that you may be at higher risk for hereditary breast and ovarian cancer.

Is Genetic Testing Right For You?

About 5% to 10% of all cancers develop because a person inherited a genetic mutation. A genetic mutation is a small change in your DNA. Genetic testing is the process of looking for these changes. Some mutations affect your ability to fight off cancer cells. For example, everyone has a BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene. Having a mutation on one of these genes means your body has a harder time fighting cancer cells in your breasts and ovaries.

What Does Genetic Testing Tell You?

What we know about genetic mutations is constantly changing, so it is important to know what can and cannot be learned from genetic testing.

Benefits of Genetic Testing:

- The results from a genetic test could save your life.
- Finding out if you carry a mutation allows you to take action to reduce your risk.
- You will be able to make informed decisions about your healthcare for years to come.

Limitations of Genetic Testing:

- Testing does not yet detect all causes of hereditary cancer.
- A negative test is most helpful when there is a known mutation in the family.

Other Important Factors to Think About

Having a higher chance to develop cancer is something that your whole family faces together. Here are a few things to consider:

- BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene mutations may be passed on in a family.
- If you have a gene mutation, your parents, children, and brothers and sisters have a 50% chance to have the same gene mutation.
- Your aunts, uncles, and cousins may also be at risk to have the same gene mutation.
- Testing is the only way to identify gene mutation carriers.
- It is important to share test results with family members.
    - Family members have different viewpoints and reactions to genetic testing.

Deciding to go through genetic testing is a big decision and should be thought about carefully.

Federal laws (HIPAA and GINA) and laws in most states prohibit discrimination regarding employment eligibility, health benefits, or health insurance premiums solely based on genetic information.

If You Test Positive:

- If your result is positive, it means that you carry a genetic mutation that increases your cancer risk.
- There are many ways to manage your cancer risk. You and your doctor will work together to develop a care plan that is right for you.
- Care plans for specific cancer risks are made based on medical guidelines.
- These plans may include more frequent screening, surgeries and medications that reduce your risk, and lifestyle changes.

If You Test Negative:

- If your result is negative, you do not carry a known genetic mutation that increases cancer risk.
- However, it is not uncommon for cancer(s) to "run in the family" even when no genetic mutation is found.
- If this is the case for you, you might still have a higher risk that most people because of your family history of cancer.
- As a result, your doctor may want to personalize a care plan based on your personal and/or family history.
- It is important that you keep your doctor updated on changes to your health and cancer family history.