

Genetic Counseling

Genetic counseling is a process to help you understand your risk for hereditary cancer and make informed decisions about your care.

During your appointment, a genetic counselor may talk with you about:

- Your medical history
- Your family history of cancer
- Your family history of other medical conditions

Your genetic counselor uses this information to estimate the chance that you have a hereditary condition that causes a higher than usual risk for cancer. This is called a cancer risk assessment.

Your counselor may also talk with you about genetic testing, cancer screening and cancer prevention options. He or she will help you understand your risk and help you make decisions that are best for you.

Who are genetic counselors?

Genetic counselors are health professionals with graduate degrees and experience in the areas of medical genetics and counseling. Most counselors enter the field with a background in biology, genetics, nursing, psychology, public health or social work.

Who should have cancer genetic counseling?

Consider seeing a genetic counselor for a cancer risk assessment if your personal or family history includes signs of hereditary cancer. Hereditary cancers tend to differ from non-hereditary cancers.

Signs that cancer may be hereditary include when:

- A cancer diagnosis occurs at younger age than in the general population (often younger than age 50).
- Multiple people from the same side of the family have the same or related types of cancer.
- Cancer develops in more than one site in the body.

You may also consider genetic counseling if you have any of the following:

- Breast or ovarian cancer diagnosis with Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry (Eastern or Central European Jews)
- Polyposis (multiple polyps in the colon, stomach or small intestine)
- Certain rare cancers, such as male breast cancer, retinoblastoma, medullary thyroid cancer or pheochromocytoma/paraganglioma
- A family member with a genetic test that confirms a hereditary cancer syndrome

Making an Appointment

Current MD Anderson patients should ask their doctor for a referral to genetic counseling.

New patients interested in having a cancer risk assessment should contact 855-384-6254 or visit www.mdanderson.org.

If possible, gather information about your family cancer history (including each family member's age of cancer diagnosis) before your appointment. This includes cancer history on your children, brothers and sisters, parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents.

More Information About Genetic Counseling

National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC)

312-673-6972

<http://www.nsgc.org>

MD Anderson Cancer Center – Clinical Cancer Genetics Program

713-745-7391 or toll free 877-641-0979

<http://www.mdanderson.org>