

Genetic Counseling

Genetic counseling is a process to help you understand your risk for cancer that is passed down in your family, called hereditary cancer, and to make informed decisions about your care.

Genetic Counselors

Genetic counselors are health professionals with experience in medical genetics and counseling.

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 will use this information to estimate the chance that you have a hereditary condition that causes a higher 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. Your counselor will help you to understand your risk so you can make decisions that are best for you.

Hereditary Cancers

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

Your cancer may be hereditary if:

- A cancer diagnosis occurs at a younger age, 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:

- A breast or ovarian cancer diagnosis and Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry. Ashkenazi Jewish people settled in Eastern and Central Europe.
- Polyposis, a condition that causes multiple polyps in the colon, stomach or small intestine.
- Certain rare cancers, such as male breast cancer, retinoblastoma, medullary thyroid cancer, pheochromocytoma or paraganglioma.
- A family member with a genetic test that confirms a hereditary cancer syndrome.

Speak with a Genetic Counselor

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

New patients interested in having a cancer risk assessment at MD Anderson should contact 855-384-6254 or visit www.MDAnderson.org to make an appointment.

You can also contact the National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC) to find local genetic counseling services by calling 312-673-6972 or visit www.NSGC.org.

If possible, gather information about your family cancer history, including each family member's age of cancer diagnosis, before your appointment. This includes any cancer history in your children, siblings, parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents.