Is the Cancer in Your Family Hereditary?

What is hereditary cancer?

Hereditary cancers occur because of a change (mutation) in certain genes that normally protect the body from developing cancer. This change increases a person’s risk for multiple cancers and can be passed down from mothers or fathers to daughters and sons.

BRCA1, BRCA2, PALB2, ATM, CHEK2, BRIP1 and PTEN are the names of some of the genes associated with hereditary breast, ovarian and related cancers (HBOC). Mutations in other genes can also increase risk for breast, ovarian, pancreatic, melanoma, prostate and/or other cancers.

Signs of hereditary breast, ovarian and related cancers

You or a relative has had any of the following:

- ovarian, fallopian tube or primary peritoneal cancer at any age
- breast cancer at age 50 or younger
- two separate breast cancers
- a type of breast cancer called “triple-negative breast cancer”
- male breast cancer
- pancreatic cancer
- prostate cancer at age 55 or younger or metastatic prostate cancer
- Eastern European Jewish ancestry and any of the above cancers at any age

OR

More than one family member on the same side of your family has had any of the following cancers:

- breast cancer
- ovarian, fallopian tube or primary peritoneal cancer
- prostate cancer
- pancreatic cancer
- melanoma

Other hereditary cancers, such as colon, uterine or thyroid cancer, may be caused by different gene mutations associated with Lynch and Cowden syndromes. A genetics expert can help you understand if the cancers in your family may be caused by an inherited mutation.
What is genetic testing and how might it affect you?

A blood or saliva test can tell if a mutation runs in your family. Results may affect your medical decisions, so it’s important to speak with a genetics expert before and after testing.

A positive test result means that an inherited gene mutation was found in one of your genes. Your risk for certain cancers may be increased. Your exact cancer risk depends on which gene has the mutation, your gender, age, family history of cancer and other factors.

If you test positive for a gene mutation, you have options for lowering your cancer risk and detecting cancer at an earlier, more treatable stage. You may be eligible for different treatment, enhanced screening, risk-reducing surgery or medication to lower risk. Your results may affect your eligibility for clinical trials.

If you test positive for a mutation, each of your children and siblings has a 50% chance of carrying the mutation. Other relatives may also carry the same mutation as you.

A negative genetic test result means that no mutation was found in any of the genes included in your test. If you test negative, your risk for cancer will vary depending on several factors including your family medical history.

Whether positive or negative, it is important to share test result information with your family members. Your results may provide them with important clues about their own cancer risk.

Where can I learn more about hereditary cancer?

Experts in cancer genetics can help you understand hereditary cancer and provide you and your family with information about your cancer risk.

To learn more about hereditary cancer, visit www.facingourrisk.org. To receive support, call our peer support helpline at 866-288-RISK (7475) or visit www.facingourrisk.org/pnp.

You don’t need to face HBOC alone. FORCE is here for you!

Educational Information
Our website is the largest repository of expert-reviewed hereditary cancer information.
www.facingourrisk.org

Local Support
Trained volunteers provide nonjudgmental support to individuals in local communities.
www.facingourrisk.org/support

Joining FORCes Conference
The largest HBOC gathering attracts people with mutations or a family history of cancer, and medical professionals who treat this community.
www.facingourrisk.org/conference

Personalized Peer Support
FORCE’s Peer Navigation Program matches individuals to trained volunteers who share a similar experience and provide confidential phone support and a free personalized guide.
www.facingourrisk.org/pnp

Hereditary Cancer Research
FORCE’s research program matches people affected by hereditary cancer with prevention, detection, treatment and other research studies enrolling people like them.
www.facingourrisk.org/research

XRAYS – Making Sense of Cancer Headlines
Funded by the CDC, XRAYS helps breast cancer survivors and people at high risk more easily understand breast cancer-related news and information.
www.facingourrisk.org/XRAYS

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