



CANCER RISK & GENETIC TESTING

About half of all men and about one in three women will be diagnosed with some kind of cancer. That's why it's important to understand what you can do to reduce your risk of developing cancer.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT MOST OF THE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO REDUCE YOUR CANCER RISK HAVE OTHER HEALTH BENEFITS

Programs offered by your employer can help you meet your goals related to diet, exercise and weight management, as well as help reduce your risk for cancer and other serious health conditions. Another good step is to participate in health assessments and health fairs when offered. The tips below offer some other suggestions.

- **Don't use tobacco products.** Tobacco use, cigarette smoking in particular, is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States. All types of tobacco use increase the risk of developing lung cancer, cancers of the head and neck and several other kinds of cancer. If you smoke or use smokeless tobacco, talk with your doctor about whether you are a candidate for medications that can help you quit tobacco use. It's difficult for many people to stop smoking on their own, so consider joining a support group.
- **Avoid being around people who smoke.** Exposure to other people's smoke increases the risk of developing lung cancer and a number of other cancers. If others are smoking in enclosed spaces, either leave the room or ask the smoker to go outside.
- **If you drink alcohol, drink only in moderation.** Consumption of large amounts of alcohol can lead to liver cancer and other medical problems. Moderate alcohol consumption is defined as having no more than one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men. A drink is defined as one 12-ounce beer, one 5-ounce glass wine or 1½ ounces of 80-proof liquor. In particular, women who are at increased risk of developing breast cancer should avoid alcohol.

- **Prevent infections.** Certain viruses and bacteria are associated with an increased risk of cancer. Vaccines are available to reduce the risk of developing human papillomavirus (HPV) and hepatitis B.
- **Avoid ultraviolet exposure from sunlight and tanning booths.** Stay out of the sun as much as possible, and use adequate amounts of sunscreen (look for SPF 30 or higher) when in the sun. Stay out of tanning booths. Skin damage from tanning is especially harmful for children and teens.

Cancer is not one disease. More than 100 different diseases are considered cancer. All types of cancer start when abnormal cells grow out of control, which can cause serious illness and even death. Each type of cancer is different and requires different treatment.

- Some kinds of cancers are linked to lifestyle and behaviors like tobacco use, excessive drinking, too much sun exposure, poor nutrition or physical inactivity.
 - Only about 5%-10% of cancers are inherited.
 - Often it's impossible to know how a cancer began.
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- **Maintain a healthy diet and weight.** There are many health benefits to eating a healthy diet and getting regular exercise to help maintain a normal weight. Being overweight or obese is associated with a higher risk of developing several types of cancer and has other undesirable health effects.
 - **Get recommended cancer screenings.** Screenings for breast, colon, cervical, skin and prostate cancer when recommended and supported by evidence.



CANCER GENETIC TESTING: IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

If you have a history of cancer in your family, it *may* mean that you are at increased risk for developing cancer. In some cases, cancer is caused by an abnormal gene that is passed along from generation to generation. Although this is often referred to as inherited cancer, what is inherited is the abnormal gene that can lead to cancer, not the cancer itself. Only about 5%-10% of all cancers are caused by an abnormal inherited gene.

If you are a candidate for genetic testing, you should be referred to a genetic counselor or other clinician with expertise in cancer genetics. This professional can explain the process and describe the pros and cons of testing. The genetic counselor will also help you view your genetic risk in light of any other risk factors you may have and provide information related to your specific situation. This will help you make an informed decision about testing, screening and prevention options. If you decide to move forward with testing, the genetic counselor will be there to explain the results.

If you have a family history of a type of cancer that is genetically linked (this includes some types of breast, ovarian, pancreatic, endometrial and colon cancers), you may want to talk to your doctor about genetic testing. Genetic testing and counseling can help you understand your risk and whether there is anything you can do to reduce it.

Assessment of an individual's risk of hereditary cancer is based on a thorough evaluation of the family history. Through a series of questions, your doctor can determine if genetic testing is appropriate for you.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

American Cancer Society: <http://www.cancer.org/healthy/> and <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancercauses/geneticsandcancer/genetic-testing/genetic-testing-intro>

American Institute for Cancer Research: <http://www.aicr.org/reduce-your-cancer-risk/> and <http://www.aicr.org/assets/docs/pdf/brochures/facts-about-alcohol.pdf>

National Cancer Institute: <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/prevention-genetics-causes>. This site provides information on many topics related to cancer prevention.