

Genetic Counseling for Cancer Risk

What is Genetic Counseling?

Genetic counseling is a communication process between you and a genetic counselor.

The purpose of genetic counseling is to help you and/or your family members to:

- Understand more about the causes of cancer.
- Appreciate the way heredity contributes to cancer.
- Understand your personal risk of developing cancer.
- Understand the options for dealing with an increased risk for cancer.
- Choose a course of action for managing cancer risk that seems personally appropriate (including possible genetic testing, screening or long-term follow up).
- Adjust to any concerns about cancer.



What is a Genetic Counselor?

Genetic counselors are health professionals with advanced education and expertise in the areas of medical genetics and counseling.

Genetic counselors are master's-level trained. National certification through the American Board of Genetic Counseling or the American Board of Medical Genetics helps to assure the public of qualified professional care. They work as members of a team of health care professionals that may include physicians, medical geneticists, nurses and nurse practitioners, nutritionists, social workers, mental health workers and/or researchers.

What Can You Expect During a Visit?

Genetic counseling visits provide time with an expert to discuss personal risk for cancer and options for managing that risk.

The first visit for genetic counseling generally lasts 1-2 hours. A second visit to discuss test results and any lingering questions may be necessary. A written summary of the appointment is often provided to the patient (and family or personal physician, if requested). During the visit, a genetic counselor will:

- Obtain and review your family medical history information (usually a minimum of 3 generations). In some clinics, family histories may be obtained in advance by mail or phone.
- Obtain and review your personal medical history.
- Review the inheritance pattern(s) and natural history of cancer, the risk of cancer occurrence, and any preventive, screening and/or reproductive options.
- Discuss options for available genetic testing (including discussion of the pros and cons of testing), and arrange for testing (as appropriate).
- Discuss possible ethical and social concerns such as confidentiality, insurability, discrimination, employment issues, and genetic testing of minor children.
- Refer you to appropriate medical specialties and community resources, as needed.
- Support your decisions in the context of your personal values, beliefs, and goals.
- Arrange for genetic counseling and genetic testing of other family members, as needed.

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Mid Atlantic Cancer Genetics Network

1-877-880-6188

www.MACGN.org

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Where Can You Find a Genetic Counselor?

Genetic counselors work in major university medical centers, private hospitals and clinics, and HMO or other managed care settings.

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) maintains a continuously updated, on-line resource directory of counselors who specialize in cancer genetics in the United States and abroad. Providers can search the NCI Web site (http://www.cancer.gov/search/genetics_services/) by city, state and type of cancer.

For cancer genetic counseling resources in the Mid Atlantic region of the United States or for a referral, please contact the **Mid-Atlantic Cancer Genetics Network** toll free at **1-877-880-6188** or visit our Web site at <http://www.MACGN.org>.

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