Genetic Counseling

Your doctor may ask you to have an appointment with a genetic counselor. This service may be new to you.

During a genetic counseling session, a genetic counselor will review your medical history and ask you questions about your family cancer history and sometimes other medical conditions. The genetic counselor will use this information to estimate the chance that you could have an inherited condition that causes a higher than usual risk for cancer. The counselor may also talk to you about genetic testing.

The genetic counselor will explain how genetics and family history can affect cancer risks. He or she will help you understand your own risk and help you make decisions that are best for you. For example, if you are found to have an increased risk for cancer, the genetic counselor can explain more aggressive cancer screening and available prevention options.

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.

Should I consider having cancer genetic counseling?

You should consider seeing a genetic counselor for a cancer risk assessment if your personal and/or family history includes signs of hereditary cancer. Hereditary cancers tend to differ from non-hereditary cancers in the following ways:

- The age cancer is diagnosed is usually younger than in the general population (often younger than age 50).
- Multiple people from the same side of the family tend to have the same or related types of cancer.
- Cancer is more likely to develop in more than one site in the body.

Additionally, people with the following should consider genetic counseling:

- 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 diagnosing a hereditary cancer syndrome
How do I make a genetic counseling appointment at MD Anderson?

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 the Clinical Cancer Genetics Program at 713-745-7391 or toll-free 877-900-8894.

After you receive a genetic counseling appointment, log into your MyChart account and click the Notices section. Click on the link to complete your family cancer health history. If you do not see a link, call 713-792-5072 for help finding the link. During your appointment, a genetic counselor will review your health history with you.

For More Information on 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