

Why It's Important to Talk About Family History

Understanding your family's health history is important for your own health. If you find a history of ovarian, breast, or colorectal cancer, you may have an increased risk for ovarian cancer. You might share an inherited genetic mutation (BRCA1, BRCA2) that can cause ovarian cancer. These mutations can be passed down from either parent. If you find this to be true, there are things you can do to reduce your risk. If you have children, discuss their risk with your doctor. This information can also help guide treatment if you do develop cancer.

Talking to your relatives may be hard to do for some.

- Your relatives may not be open to talking about family cancer risk
- Some may wish to keep their health history private
- Consider the viewpoints of everyone when having these discussions
- Consider having the conversation at the next family event
- Consider having a private one-on-one conversation

When speaking to family, here are some tips:

- Explain why this information is important
- Educate your family about genetics and risk
- Be open about your own health

What You Should Talk About

To understand your hereditary cancer risk, which is cancer caused by an inherited genetic mutation, you will need to ask your relatives the following medical questions:

- Has anyone in our family (immediate or distant) been diagnosed with cancer?
- If so, what kind of cancer? At what age were they diagnosed?
- Do we have any medical records or documents?
- For relatives who have passed, what were the causes of death? At what ages did they pass away?
- What is our family's ancestry?
- Has anyone in the family had genetic testing? If so, do we know the results?

Who You Should Talk About It With

The more closely related you are to someone in your family, the more likely you will have similar DNA, so start the conversation with your first-degree relatives.

- First-degree relatives: parents, siblings, and children
- Second-degree relatives: are half-siblings, uncles, aunts, grandparents, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews
- Third-degree relatives: cousins, great grandparents, great aunts, and great uncles

It is important to talk with both the women AND the men in your family. It is possible that genetic risk for ovarian cancer could be passed on by your father's side of the family.

