Genetic Testing for Hereditary Cancers

Frequently Asked Questions

What is genetic testing?

Genetic testing for hereditary cancers looks at your DNA to see if there are any harmful changes that could increase your risk of cancer. These changes are called mutations.

When is genetic testing recommended?

Most cancer is not hereditary. Only about 5-10% of cancers are due to a genetic predisposition. Genetic testing is typically recommended if you or a family member have been diagnosed with certain types of cancer or cancer at a young age. It may also be recommended if there is a strong family history of cancer. Your provider can help determine if genetic testing is right for you.

How is this test done?

You will be asked to provide a saliva or blood sample. Sometimes there is not enough DNA material in your saliva and a blood sample may be needed after a saliva sample is submitted.

Who is doing the testing?

Your provider will determine which company is best for the test you need. This may vary based on your insurance and which tests are available. Your sample will be collected at Ochsner and sent to the appropriate genetic testing company.

What will this test tell me?

This test will show if you have a genetic predisposition that could increase your risk of cancer, or might explain why you have a history of cancer. It will not diagnose you with cancer. Your results may help your medical team come up with the best plan for your care.

What are the possible results of this test?

The results can be positive, negative, or a "variant of uncertain significance" (VUS).

- A *positive* result means that a genetic mutation has been identified. Your doctor will use these results plus your personal and family history to help develop a plan for you.
- A *negative* result means that a genetic mutation was not identified. It could be that there are no genetic mutations. It could also mean that science has not yet discovered all mutations.
- A *variant of uncertain significance (VUS)* means that one or more of your genes has a change, but there is not enough evidence to determine if it is related to causing disease. Most of these results turn out to be benign – meaning they are not related to cancer.

Will I get cancer if I have a genetic mutation?

A positive result does not mean a person will definitely get cancer. If you have a mutation, your doctor looks at what that mutation is related to, and what other factors might contribute to your cancer risk.

I have or had cancer, but I do not have a genetic mutation. How did that happen?

Cancer is caused by many different factors. These can include genetics, family history, and environmental causes. For some cancers, the cause may not be known. Genetics may play a part in why someone developed cancer, but it is not the only factor contributing to why people get cancer.

+ **Need more information?** We can help you come up with a plan based on your personal history, your family history, and your results. To make an appointment with one of our genetics professionals, ask your provider to refer you to Cancer Genetics or call 504-842-3910.

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