Our Specialty Programs

The Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer Program addresses the concerns of families with a history of breast and ovarian cancer. About 5-10% of breast and ovarian cancer cases are associated with an inherited risk; caused by genes that may pass from parents to their children. For families with a history of early onset breast and/or ovarian cancer the most common genetic test is for changes within the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes.

For patients with an increased chance to develop breast and/or ovarian cancer, we discuss appropriate cancer screening and management. Examples of screening options include mammograms or breast MRIs. Some patients are candidates for medication to prevent breast cancer. Some patients also consider surgery to prevent cancer. We collaborate closely with our colleagues in medical oncology, the Breast Care Center, plastic surgery, gynecologic oncology and others to provide comprehensive care.

The Hereditary Colorectal Cancer Program addresses the concerns of families with a history of colorectal cancer or polyps. Some families with hereditary colorectal cancer will also have members of the family with cancers of the uterus (endometrium), ovary, urinary tact or upper gastrointestinal tract. About 3-5% of colorectal cancer cases are associated with an inherited risk; caused by genes that may pass from parents to their children. The most common conditions for which we offer genetic testing are Lynch syndrome (also called Hereditary Non-Polyposis Colorectal Cancer, or HNPCC) and Familial Adenomatous Polyposis (FAP).

For patients with an increased chance to develop colorectal cancer, we discuss appropriate cancer screening and management. Even for patients who do not have genetic testing, we discuss screening options such as colonoscopy and upper endoscopy. We determine the appropriate age to start screening and at what frequency. We team with gastroenterologists, surgeons, pathologists, gynecologists, medical oncologists, and others to provide comprehensive care.

The members of the Cancer Genetics and Prevention Program also see patients with other types of cancer running in the family. For example, we now have genetic testing options for familial pancreatic cancer. We offer screening for pancreatic cancer to patients at increased risk.

If you are concerned about any type of cancer in your family, talk to your healthcare provider about whether a referral to the Cancer Genetics and Prevention Program is appropriate.

If you are interested in scheduling an appointment, please call the Cancer Genetics and Prevention Program at 617-667-1905.

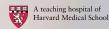
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Cancer Genetics & Prevention Program

The Cancer Genetics and Prevention Program serves those at increased risk of hereditary cancer. We offer guidance about genetic testing, and cancer screening and prevention.



Are you concerned about cancer in your family?

Unfortunately, cancer is an all too common disease in the American population. Five to ten percent of most common adult onset cancers are hereditary.

We are more concerned about hereditary forms of cancer in families with...

- Early Onset Cancer (age < 50)
- Cancer in multiple generations
- Clusters of certain cancer types (such as breast and ovarian, or colorectal and uterine)
- Rare cancers (such as male breast cancer)
- Bilateral breast cancer in women
- Multiple cancer types in a single relative
- Ovarian cancer in any family member
- Certain ethnicities (such as Ashkenazi Jewish)

Families with hereditary forms of cancer are more likely to develop certain types of cancer. The cancers are more likely to develop at younger ages. Therefore, we work to identify these families, so that we can offer options for vigilant screening and prevention of cancer.

We see patients who have never had cancer, but are concerned about a family history of cancer. We also see patients who have had cancer and are concerned about their future risks and those of their family members.

A Genetic Counselor can help you learn more about your family's cancers.

Genetic counselors are health care professionals with specialized training in medical genetics and counseling. Genetic counselors usually work as members of a healthcare team, providing information and support to families who may be at risk for a variety of inherited conditions.

At your first appointment with the Cancer Genetics and Prevention Program, you will meet with a genetic counselor. During this appointment, we will review your family's medical history. This is an informational session. You will want to learn as much as you can about your family history ahead of time. Our program will send you a form to help you collect this information. Your family's medical history will guide our discussion about personalized cancer risk.

In some situations, genetic testing for hereditary cancer genes is appropriate. We will discuss the risks, benefits and limitations of the testing. This discussion includes what medical choices you would have if the genetic test comes back positive (abnormal), the emotional impact that might occur, and the implications for other family members.

Evaluation of family history and/or genetic test results can help us know your chance of getting cancer in the future. We use this information to recommend ways to prevent or detect cancer at an early stage. If you already have cancer, it may affect your treatment choices. The information is also important for your relatives. Our genetic counselors will work closely with you to help share important information with your entire family.

When genetic tests were first developed, some people were concerned about possible genetic discrimination. However, federal and state laws are in place to protect against healthcare and workplace discrimination. We also discuss life and disability insurance concerns.

After speaking with the genetic counselor, you can decide if you want genetic testing. You can have testing immediately after the session or at a later time. Genetic testing is a blood test. Most health insurance plans cover genetic testing.

Regardless of whether a patient has genetic testing, we offer a follow-up appointment with one of the physicians in the Cancer Genetics and Prevention Program. Each patient will learn how high his or her chance is to develop cancer. The ultimate goal of the program is to establish a cancer screening and prevention plan tailored to each patient, based on his or her medical history, family history and genetic status.

Our Physicians



Nadine Tung, MD Medical Oncology Program Director, CGPP

Douglas Pleskow, MD Gastroenterologist

Mandeep Sawhney, MD Gastroenterologist