



# Does Cancer Run in My Family?

**Learning** that breast cancer doesn't run in my family is a huge relief. Before, I was so worried I didn't even go for screening.

**My family is important.** I want to do what is right for them. Getting information is something I can do.

## What is cancer?

Cancer is caused by changes (called mutations) in our genes. Genes control how the cells in our body divide and grow. When a gene mutation happens, that control does not work well anymore. As a result, cells divide and grow abnormally, and may become cancer. Several gene mutations happen over time that may result in cancer. That is why most cancers develop in older people.

**About 7 in 10 people diagnosed with cancer are aged 60 and above**

**1 in 10 cancers diagnosed is hereditary**

## How can I get more information?

Review your family history of cancer with your doctor.

**Referral information**  
**Cancer Genetics Service**

National Cancer Centre Singapore  
Level B2, 11 Hospital Drive Singapore 169610  
Call **6436 8088** for a referral or an appointment.

Mondays - Fridays: 8.30am to 5.30pm  
Closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays

**For general information about cancer:**

Call the Cancer Helpline at **6225 5655**  
or email [cancerhelpline@nccs.com.sg](mailto:cancerhelpline@nccs.com.sg)

Visit the Cancer Genetics Service webpage at  
<http://www.nccs.com.sg/PatientCare/CancerGeneticsService>

**This is a public education initiative by:**  
Cancer Education & Information Service



## Cancer is common. Hereditary cancer is not common.

### What is hereditary cancer?

Hereditary cancer is cancer that runs in the family. It happens when a change (mutation) in a gene is passed down from one generation to the next. Some gene mutations increase the risk of cancer. That is why hereditary cancer is seen at younger ages and more often in some families.

In hereditary cancer, gene mutations are sometimes passed down from father or mother. Individuals born with a gene mutation may or may not develop cancer, but their risk of cancer may be greater.

**Most families do *not* have hereditary cancer.**

### Is my family at risk for hereditary cancer?

Almost everyone has a relative who has had cancer. In large families, several relatives may have had cancer. Age is the biggest risk factor for cancer. Other common risk factors include smoking and diet. Some families seem to have more people with cancer than others.

## Age is the most important risk factor for cancer



**Worrying was not helping.** *I checked my family history with my doctor. Now we can do something about it.*

### What should I do if I think there is hereditary cancer in my family?

Remember that hereditary cancer is rare. If you are concerned, talk to your relatives to find out if anyone else is already looking into this. Collect your family history of cancer and take it to your doctor. Together, you will discuss the chance of hereditary cancer in your family. Ask your doctor if you need a referral to the Cancer Genetics Service.

### What is the Cancer Genetics Service?

The Cancer Genetics Service is part of the National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS). We offer services to families and individuals in Singapore. Services include genetic counselling and information about cancer screening. People at risk of hereditary cancer may also be offered genetic testing as it can affect their management.

The Cancer Genetics Service works to educate the public and health care providers about hereditary cancer. The program also supports research into all aspects of hereditary cancer.

## What are signs of hereditary cancer?

You might think about hereditary cancer if more than 2 of your close relatives have had cancer. Other signs include relatives with the same kind of cancer diagnosed at a young age. Sometimes the combination of different cancers in a family may also be a sign of hereditary cancer. The more close relatives with cancer you have, the higher the chance of hereditary cancer.

Close relatives include: children, siblings, parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents from the same side of the family.

✓	✗
<b>Hereditary Cancer</b> Your father had colon cancer at age 49 <b>and</b> your father's sister had colon cancer at age 47 <b>and</b> your sister had uterine cancer at age 45	<b>UNLIKELY Hereditary Cancer</b> Your father had liver cancer at age 72 <b>and</b> your mother's brother had colon cancer at age 65 <b>and</b> your sister had cervical cancer at age 55

### You might also think about hereditary cancer if:

- Several of your close relatives had a rare cancer.

For example, sarcoma, adrenal or medullary thyroid cancer.

- One of your close relatives had cancer at an unusually young age.

For example, a brother with colon cancer in his 30's. Or a sister with breast cancer in her 30's.

## Most cancers can be cured if they are detected early.