June 2013

7 Questions on cancer gene testing

Everyone has the BRCA1 and BRCA2. Here genes were discovered in the mid-1990’s. Genetic testing for the genes is increasingly available. We have two copies of each gene and get one each from our mother and father. They play a role in protecting the body against the development of cancer. Individuals with mutations in either of these genes have increased cancer risks, most notably for breast and ovarian cancer. Individuals with mutations in BRAC1 and BRAC2 benefits from tailored management aimed at reducing cancer risks and detecting cancers early when they are most treatable. Here are some common questions that are asked regarding genetic testing for breast and ovarian cancer.

What is BRCA1 testing?
BRCA testing is a genetic test that looks at the sequence or code of the BRCA1 and/or BRCA2 genes. Changes or mutations in the genetic code indicate increased cancer risks. The test can be performed on a blood or saliva sample. It takes about three weeks to get results.

What does a positive result mean?
A positive test result in BRCA1 or BRCA2 means that the person has a genetic mutation that increases cancer risk. A positive BRCA1 result gives a woman 60% to 80% lifetime risk of breast cancer and a 30%-to 45% lifetime risk of ovarian cancer. A positive BRCA2 result gives a woman a 50% to 70% lifetime risk of breast cancer and a 10% to 20% lifetime risk of ovarian cancer.

BRCA1 and BRCA2 are also associated with other moderately increased cancer risks that vary; depending on which gene has a mutation.

Does everyone need to be tested? If not, who should be?
Only about 5% of breast cancers and 10%-to 15% of ovarian cancers are caused by mutations in BRCA1 and BRCA2. Therefore, not everyone needs to undergo genetic testing. Genetic counselors and other health care providers can help determine whether genetic testing is appropriate by exploring one’s personal and family history of cancer and other factors such as ethnicity, as BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations are more common in certain populations.

How much is BRCA testing, and does insurance cover it?
BRCA testing is usually covered by insurance if certain criteria are met. These are different types of BRCA testing, ranging in cost from $475 to about $4,000. Genetic counselors are helpful in determining what type of testing is indicated. Testing is less expensive once a mutation has been identified within a family.

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7 Questions on cancer gene testing (cont.)

Who should get genetic counseling?
Individuals with a personal or family history of breast cancer appearing before age 50, ovarian cancer at any age, breast cancer in both breasts, male breast cancer, multiple cases of breast cancer within a family, and breast cancer in individuals of Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry should get genetic counseling to determine whether they should be tested.

When should I be tested?
In addition to determining if BRCA testing is appropriate for you or your family; your healthcare providers can help you consider when to undergo genetic testing. It is important to consider when medical management might be changed for individuals with BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutations, as this can guide the decision of when to test.

What factors should I weigh in deciding whether to have a preventive mastectomy or oophorectomy (ovary removal)?
Detailed discussions with genetics experts, surgical oncologists, plastic surgeons and genetic counselors are important steps in considering whether and when a prophylactic mastectomy or oophorectomy is right for you. While the lifetime risk for breast and ovarian cancers in BRCA carriers are high, the risks increase with age. Since breast cancer screening is good at picking up breast cancers early, when they are most treatable, screening is a reasonable option for carriers’. Since ovarian cancer screening has not been proven reliably to catch ovarian cancer early; risk-reducing oophorectomy is recommended for BRCA1 and BRCA2 carriers ideally between the ages of 35 to 40.

Source: http://us.cnn.com/2013/05/15health

What to eat to cure your ills

Poor eyesight
The solution: Kale — one cup daily
The Science: Xanthophyll pigments not only give kale (and other leafy greens) its color, they can also help slow age-related macular degeneration, the process by which vision goes from sharp to blurry.

Muscle ache
The solution: Tart cherries — one cup, or two glasses of juice, daily, before and during exercise
The Science: Contains the same anti-inflammatory enzymes as ibuprofen, without the potential kidney and stomach-related side effects.

Memory loss
The solution: Sunflower seeds — a quarter cup daily
The Science: These vitamin E-loaded seeds will protect the neurons in your brain from oxidative stress, which means you keep your memory longer.

Weak muscles
The solution: Apples — one daily
The Science: Leave the peel on — it's full of ursolic acid, which fuels the production of insulin-like growth factor-1 (IGF1) and insulin, two hormones important in building muscle.

Erectile dysfunction
The solution: Garlic — one to two cloves daily, in food
The Science: Crushed garlic contains allicin, a compound that can decrease blood pressure and improve blood flow, which may lead to a harder erection.

Aging skin
The solution: Oranges — one daily, or six ounces of juice.
The Science: Vitamin C helps your body make collagen, the protein that keeps skin elastic.

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**What to eat to cure your ills**

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**Lack of focus**
The solution: Eggs—one daily
The Science: Eggs are packed with choline, a nutrient that boosts the brain's ability to relay commands to the rest of your body while also maintaining the structure of your brain's cell membranes.

**Depression**
The Solution: Brown rice — one cup of cooked rice daily
The Science: Carbs help regulate the production of serotonin, a key neurotransmitter in controlling mood and suppressing anxiety. A complex carb like brown rice will give you the best high-carb-low-cal combo.

**Insomnia**
The Solution: Chicken — four ounces daily
The Science: Tryptophan is often associated with turkey, but chicken contains more of the amino acid that helps the body produce the sleep-friendly hormone melatonin.

**Puffy eyes**
The Solution: Green tea — one cup daily, after a meal
The Science: The puffiness that creates dark circles under your eyes is often caused by fluid retention. Green tea is a diuretic that'll reduce unwanted swelling all over your body.

**Upset stomach**
The Solution: Peppermints — one or two after dinner
The Science: Peppermint has long been associated with aiding digestion and has also been shown to soothe inflammatory pain in the gastrointestinal tract. Peppermint tea also works.

**Dull hair**
The solution: Spinach—one cup daily
The Science: The leaf is loaded with vitamins A and C, which help your body to create sebum, the oil secreted by follicles to give your hair gloss and shine.

**Low energy**
The solution: Bananas—one daily
The Science: The potassium-packed fruit is also a great source of magnesium, a key element in producing and storing energy.

**Anxiety**
The solution: Peanuts—a quarter cup daily
The Science: If you're not producing enough gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), your brain is more prone to let anxiety run wild. Peanuts are one of the best (and tastiest) sources of glutamine, the amino acid needed to make GABA.

*Source: http://healthyliving.msn.com/health-wellness/life*
5 ways to maximize your doctor’s visit - Health Literacy News

It helps to be prepared with data and questions for your visit, but you’re a busy person too: How can you know which data is most useful? The good news is you have all the tools you need to get the most out of your doctor’s visit at your fingertips. Technology can simplify your health care experience and help you. So get your smartphone on for better health.

1. Do your homework by all means, go to Google your symptoms! There’s plenty of information you can glean from trustworthy sites and fellow patients. Don’t be afraid to admit the scary things you’ve read while conducting your “self-diagnosis.” Your doctor can help rule out all worst-case scenarios and alleviate your worry. Yes, there are some dubious sources out there, and it is possible to overdo it. But overall, research helps you be more informed as a patient. After talking it out, your research skills will get even sharper.

2. Know your history Carry a record of your medical history in your smartphone. Make sure you have your updated health record (you can ask any of your doctors for this), especially documenting any conditions you have had in the past, along with any medication you have taken. Many apps will allow you to securely store health data. Make sure you get copies of any medical images and past lab data. Bringing in these resources helps your doctors add context to your conditions.

3. Keep tabs on yourself to be accurate as possible when discussing your current symptoms; you need to keep a timeline. Got fever? You need to know when it was at its highest. Rash? What did it look like two days ago? This information is invaluable to your doctor, who gets to see you and evaluate your symptoms only in that five-to-seven minute window. Download an electronic diary app that can store secure picture and video. Keep the description simple: think bullets, not essays. It’s very important to note how you’re feeling or how your symptoms have affected your normal functions.

4. Stay focused make a list of the most important issues you need to talk about and try not to digress. Doctors are like detectives. When you bring up a symptom, they are keenly listening for clues that might give them some ideas about your diagnosis, and they have series of questions they need to ask you. By staying focused and answering questions attentively, you make your doctor’s job easier—and you’ll get your answer more quickly.

5. Double-check your visit may be short, but there’s a whole lot of information exchanged in that seven minutes. Ask for a printed or electronic copy of your doctor’s instructions. If you’re not 100% clear, ask your doctor to sit and explain with you a second time. Don’t be afraid to question the treatment you may think is appropriate. This will help you learn and help your doctor understand your comfort level.

Source: http://www.cnn.com/2013/05/14/health