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# Genetic Counseling

## What is Genetic Counseling?

*Genetic counseling is an in-depth discussion with a genetic counselor about a genetic condition or the risk for a genetic condition in a person or family. Genetic counseling is designed to provide patients and their families with information about genetic conditions and to help them make informed decisions about testing for or management of these conditions.*

## What is a Genetic Counselor?

Genetic counselors are health care professionals with specialized degrees and experience in medical genetics and counseling. They work as members of a health care team providing information and support to individuals and families at risk for genetic conditions or having to make decisions about genetic testing. The genetic counselor's role is to help individuals and families understand genetic diseases and how genetic testing could affect them and/or their families. They are there to aid individuals and families in making informed decisions about their care.

## Who should consider genetic counseling?

The following is a list of common situations where individuals, couples or families may benefit from genetic counseling.

- People who have a genetic condition or birth defect or who have a child with or family history of a genetic condition or birth defect
- Women who are pregnant or planning to be pregnant who are 35 or older
- People interested in testing or obtaining information about diseases that happen more frequently in their ethnic group; such as Tay-Sachs disease, cystic fibrosis, sickle cell disease, and thalassemia
- People who have been identified as carriers of a genetic disease
- Women whose ultrasound or prenatal screening/testing indicates an increased risk for birth defects or complications

- Women who are concerned about the affect a medical condition or exposure to medication, radiation, illegal drugs, chemicals or infections may have on a pregnancy
- Couples who have had multiple miscarriages
- People with a personal or family history of cancer
- Women who are interested in learning more about the testing options available during pregnancy

## What happens during a genetic counseling appointment?

During a genetic counseling appointment, you and the genetic counselor will discuss any concerns that you have about genetic conditions. This includes concerns about the risk for genetic conditions in yourself, your pregnancy, your children, or other family members.

Typically a genetic counseling session consists of

- a discussion of the reason you were referred for genetic counseling
- a discussion of your personal medical, family, and pregnancy history
- an explanation of any risks identified through this discussion
- a discussion of available genetic testing options and the benefits, limitations and risks of this testing as well as determining what, if any, testing may be right for you
- making testing arrangements, if needed, and providing follow-up once results are available
- providing you with any additional resources you may need, such as educational materials, support group information, or referrals to other specialists

## How should I prepare for a genetic counseling appointment?

Gather information about the health of your family members including details about any diseases in either your mother's or father's families. Ask family members if there is anyone in the family with medical problems such as mental retardation, birth defects, disabilities, miscarriages, stillbirths, severe childhood illnesses, or cancer. Bringing more detailed information such as medical records, laboratory results, or genetic testing results on a family member with a known genetic condition with you to the appointment can also be very helpful. You may also wish to make a list of your questions so that all of your concerns are addressed.

## How do I set up an appointment for genetic counseling?

If you would like to set up an appointment for genetic counseling or are interested in learning more about genetic counseling, please contact your physician or the local genetic counseling office.

Compliments of:

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