

BRCA gene for breast cancer

You may have heard of the BRCA gene for breast cancer. But many people don't understand what this gene is, or what it really means for breast cancer risk.

WHAT BRCA REALLY MEANS

"BRCA" is an abbreviation for "BReast CAncer." There are two types: BRCA1 and BRCA2. Everyone has both of these genes. Having them does not mean you will get breast cancer.

In fact, BRCA genes actually help prevent breast cancer. They can stop or slow breast cancer growth.



WHEN BRCA GENES AREN'T GOOD

In some people however, the BRCA genes don't work properly. This is called a BRCA gene mutation.

When this happens, the BRCA genes can't prevent breast cancer. This makes the person more likely to get breast cancer. They may also develop breast cancer at a younger age. Those with BRCA mutations have a higher risk of developing other cancers too, including ovarian and pancreatic.

Up to 65 percent of women with a BRCA1 mutation will develop breast cancer before age 70. About 45 percent of women with a BRCA2 mutation will develop breast cancer by age 70.

People who have a mutated BRCA gene may also pass this along to their children.

WHAT TO DO

Women who have one of the following should talk with a doctor:

- A family history of breast cancer
- History of ovarian cancer
- History of two or more cancers of any type

In some cases, you may need a test to look at the BRCA genes. If the test finds that you have a BRCA mutation, talk with your doctor about next steps. This may include:

- Watching closely for breast cancer signs and getting regular screenings
- Taking certain medicines that can reduce estrogen, which can lower breast cancer risk
- Having a mastectomy, which is surgical removal of the breasts

SCREENING IS KEY

Even without a BRCA gene mutation, all women should talk with their doctors about breast cancer risk. They should get regular breast cancer screenings.



Finding breast cancer early is key. It means you have the best chance for successful treatment.

Sources: National Breast Cancer Foundation, National Institutes of Health