Do genetic tests *really work?*

You may have seen ads for genetic tests. These tests claim to tell you about your health. They might tell you if you're at risk for a certain disease or if you should eat a certain diet.

BIG PROMISES FROM COMPANIES

At-home genetic tests may sound exciting, and companies advertise them as "the answer" to many health issues. But the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) say you should be careful about using these tests.

Before you spend a lot of money on one, keep in mind that the test may not have any science to back up its claims. Others may give you some good information, but the information is only useful if you also have a complete medical exam.

The FDA and CDC say that genetic tests are complex. They say that the results can be hard to understand without having appropriate medical knowledge.

JUST A SNAPSHOT

Many genetic tests look at a few of your body's genes. But you have more than 20,000 genes in your body. If you get a "positive result" for certain genes, it could mean:

- You have a certain disease.
- You have a higher risk of getting certain diseases.
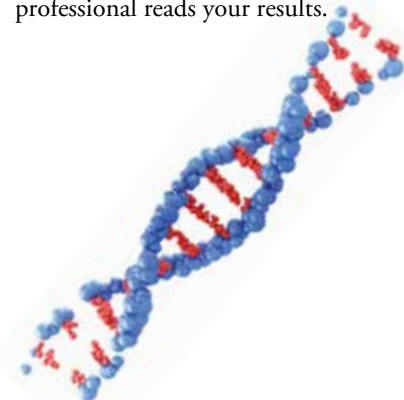- You are a carrier for a certain disease.

But even a positive result doesn't tell the whole story. You may never get the disease that comes back "positive." Or if you do, it may not be severe enough to cause any serious health problems.

A negative result means the lab didn't find any unusual changes in your genes. While this can be good news for certain diseases, it's not foolproof. It doesn't mean you'll never get a disease or have health problems. It's also possible that the test didn't look at other genes that could be important.

MANY FACTORS AT PLAY

Genes are only one piece of each person's health story. Your environment and your lifestyle also play huge parts in your physical and mental health. Don't rely on genetic tests to make any health promises. Instead, see your doctor regularly and follow a healthy lifestyle. That can mean more than a few genes.

When genetic tests are part of a medical exam, they can be helpful. Your doctor can help you decide if you need genetic tests. If you do need them, make sure a medical professional reads your results.

Source: Federal Trade Commission