

## Does Cancer Run in My Family?

Hereditary Cancer:  
Know more, worry less



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

### How can I get more information?

Review your family history of cancer with your doctor.

### For questions about hereditary cancer:

Call the Hereditary Cancer Program  
604.877.6000, local 2198

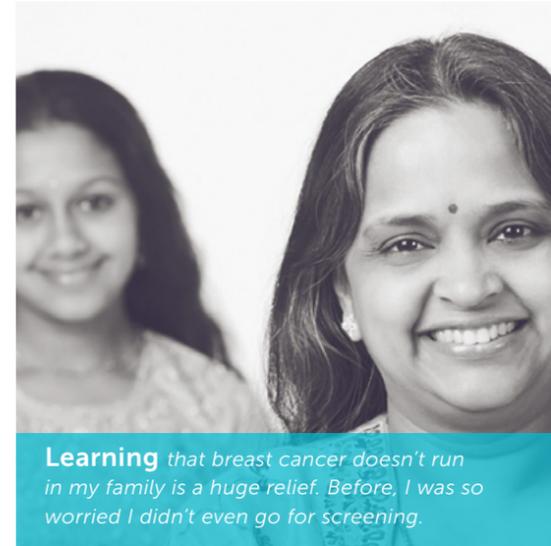
Visit the BC Cancer website  
[www.bccancer.bc.ca/hereditary](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/hereditary)

### For general information about cancer:

Call the Canadian Cancer Society's Cancer Information Service  
1.888.939.3333

Visit the Canadian Cancer Society website  
[www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)

Visit the BC Cancer website  
[www.bccancer.bc.ca](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca)



**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.

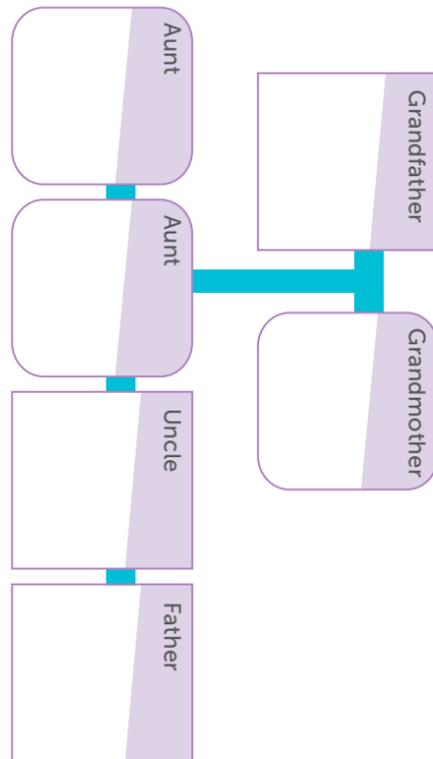
### What is cancer?

Cancer is caused by changes (called mutations) in our genes. Genes help to control how the cells in our body divide and grow. When a gene mutation happens, that control doesn't work well anymore. As a result, cells divide and grow abnormally, and can become a cancer. Several gene mutations are needed over time for cancer to develop. That is why most cancers develop in people older than 60 years of age.

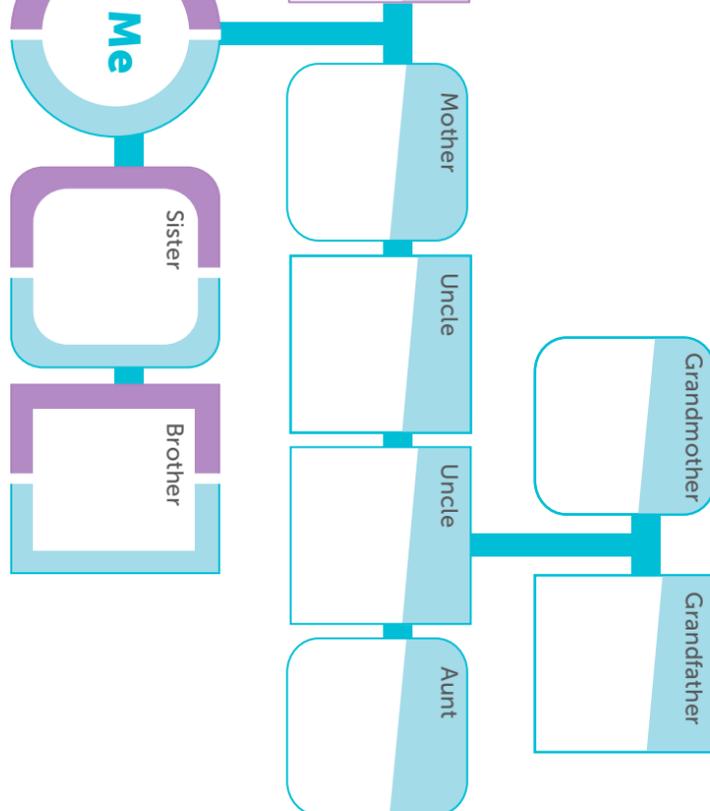
About 7 cancers in 10 occur in people aged 60 years or older.

Less than 1 cancer in 10 is hereditary.

My father's side of the family:



My mother's side of the family:



## My Family Tree

[www.bccancer.bc.ca/hereditary](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/hereditary)

Date completed (DD/MM/YY): \_\_\_\_\_

- Use this form or copy it on your own paper.
- Add, delete, or change boxes as needed. Include other relatives with cancer (cousins, children, etc.)
- Fill in the boxes to the best of your knowledge.

- Type of cancer and age it was diagnosed are important.
- If you see a pattern of cancer on either side of your family, bring your family tree to your doctor.

# Cancer is common. Hereditary cancer is not.

## What is hereditary cancer?

Hereditary cancer is cancer that runs in a 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.

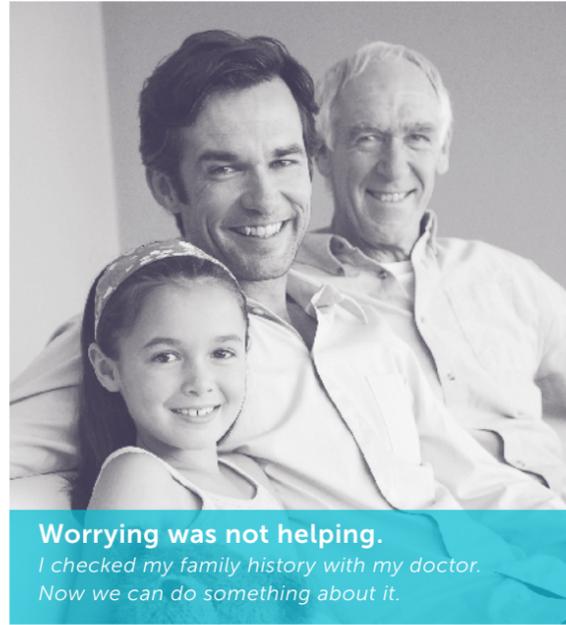
In hereditary cancer, gene mutations are sometimes passed down from a father or a mother. Persons born with a gene mutation may or may not develop cancer, but their risk of cancer is greater.

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 cancer than others.

Age is the most important risk factor for cancer.



## 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. If not, complete a family tree, such as the one in this pamphlet 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 Hereditary Cancer Program.

## What is the Hereditary Cancer Program?

The Hereditary Cancer Program is part of BC Cancer. The program offers services to families and individuals across British Columbia and Yukon. Services include genetic counselling and information about cancer screening. People at risk of hereditary cancer may also be offered genetic testing.

The Hereditary Cancer Program 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 the signs of hereditary cancer?

You might think about hereditary cancer if at least 2 close relatives have had cancer. For hereditary cancer, these relatives must be **on the same side of your family**. 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, brothers and sisters, parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents **from the same side of the family**.

✓	✗
<p><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</p>	<p><b>NOT Hereditary Cancer</b> Your father had prostate cancer at age 72 <b>and</b> your mother's brother had colon cancer at age 65 <b>and</b> your sister had breast cancer at age 45</p>

## You might also think about hereditary cancer if:

- > One close relative had ovarian cancer or pancreatic cancer.
- > One of your close relatives had cancer at a younger age than usual. For example: a brother with colon cancer in his 30's. Or a sister with breast cancer in her 30's.

Many cancers can be cured if they are detected early.

## Sample Family Tree

[www.bccancer.bc.ca/hereditary](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/hereditary)

### My mother's side of the family:

- 1 prostate cancer, at an older age
- 1 lung cancer (heavy smoker)

✗ These cancers are not related.

### My father's side of the family:

- 3 persons in 3 generations had related cancers (2 breast cancers, 1 ovarian cancer).

✓ This could be hereditary cancer, passed down from my grandmother.

