

Genetic Testing



What is Genetic Testing?

Genetic testing can help health professionals see if you have a genetic disorder. Health professionals can use these tests for many reasons. These might include:

- Screening unborn babies for genetic disorders
- Seeing if you have a disease-causing gene that could be passed onto your children
- Testing for genetic diseases in adults before they cause symptoms
- Diagnosing someone who has symptoms of a genetic disease
- Finding out which type of medicine is best for you



A common example of genetic testing is for mutations in the BRCA genes, which can cause breast or ovarian cancer.



What is Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) Genetic Testing?

Some companies now offer genetic testing. These companies allow you to send in a small sample of bodily fluid for testing. They charge a fee for this service. Some examples of companies that offer these services are:

- 23andMe
- Helix
- Ancestry DNA
- My Heritage

These companies are often referred to as “Direct-to-Consumer,” or DTC, because they advertise right to the consumer (you).



What Can DTC Genetic Testing Show?

Your results from these tests can show you a few things. These might include:

- Your genetic health risks
- If you carry certain genes for certain diseases
- Your family history from a very long time ago

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What Are the Risks of DTC Genetic Testing?

- DTC genetic testing may not give you a full picture of your health. For example, you might test “positive” for something that won’t cause problems in the long run. If you got these tests from a health professional, he or she could help you understand the results and know what they actually mean for you and your health.
- You could get a false positive result, meaning that you test positive for a health condition that you don’t really have. This can cause a lot of unneeded worry and stress. It can also lead to unnecessary follow-up tests, which can have risks and can be expensive.
- These tests are expensive, and most leading health professionals don’t think they are necessary to keep you healthy. There is no evidence to show that they save lives or keep you healthier.
- These companies save your results and keep your private health information on file. This means that your personal health information could be used in the future without your permission.



Should I Get Genetic Testing?

It’s best to talk with your trusted health professional before you decide to use one of these companies. He or she can help you understand why these tests may or may not be necessary. Most of the time, genetic testing is only needed if you show symptoms for an illness or have a family history of a genetic disorder. It may be fun to use the results to see your family history, but use caution when it comes to your health.



Questions For My Doctor

- Am I at risk for a genetic disorder?
- Would it be safe for me to use DTC genetic testing?
- When I get my results, can you help me interpret them?
- What are other ways that I can learn about my risk for disease?
- How can I stay healthy in the long run?

Notes:
