

Family history can determine cancer risk

Has anyone in your family had breast or ovarian cancer before age 50? Do you have two or more relatives with breast cancer? If you answered “yes” to either of these questions, you may be more likely to develop breast or ovarian cancer.

One in eight women will get breast cancer. Your actual risk, however, depends on both your personal and family health history. About 70 percent of women with breast cancer have no family history of the disease, but 30 percent of cases run in families.

There are two forms of breast cancer that run in families: familial and hereditary. Familial breast cancer is the result of a combination of genes and shared lifestyle factors. Women with familial breast cancer are two to three times more likely to get breast cancer.

Only 2 percent of women have a family history of hereditary breast cancer. This may include having two or more family members who develop breast or ovarian cancer before age 50.

If breast cancer runs in your family, you may be able to lower your risk by changing your lifestyle, taking medications or, in rare cases, having surgery. If you have a family history of breast or ovarian cancer, talk with your doctor about your risk and ways you can lower it.

For more information about breast and ovarian cancer, visit the community members section of the Guilford Genomic Medicine Initiative’s Web site at www.genomic-medicine.org.

