

Is genetic testing right for me?

Did you ever have breast cancer? Did your father have colon cancer?

If you said “yes,” should you get a genetic test to see if you are more likely to get these diseases? Most likely the answer is “no.”

Media reports about genetic testing sometimes make people believe they can get tested for any disease. However, genetic testing can be done only for a small number of common diseases, including breast and colon cancer. But even these tests can give useful information for only about

5 percent of the people who get these diseases.

A genetic test looks for a gene change that raises the risk for a disease. No test exists for most common diseases because most diseases are the result of a combination of genes and environmental and lifestyle factors. Therefore, a genetic test would not accurately predict the chance of disease for most conditions.

The best way to learn if you are more likely to get a disease is to know your personal and family health history. Learning who in your family has a disease, the age at diagnosis and how they are related to you can help you learn if you should get a genetic test. Talk with your family to learn what diseases run in your family. Then, talk with your doctor.

To learn more about genetic testing for breast cancer and colon cancer, go to The Genomedical Connection's Web site at www.genomedical.com. Look under “You and Your Family” for more information.

