What Every Young Woman Needs to Know About Hereditary Breast & Ovarian Cancer

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in American women.

11% of women diagnosed with breast cancer in the US are younger than 45 years old.

1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer during her life.
Breast cancer is less common in younger women than in older women, but young women are more likely to have hereditary breast cancer. Hereditary cancers run in your family and are caused by an inherited change in your genes.

BRCA stands for the BReast CAncer gene. You have two BRCA genes—one from your mother and one from your father—which help the body prevent breast cancer.

Everyone has BRCA Genes

Some people have mutations—or changes in their BRCA genes—which increase their risk for breast, ovarian, and other cancers.

1 in every 500 women in the US has either a BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutation.

If one of your parents carries a BRCA gene mutation, you have a 50% chance of also having the mutation.

You May Be at a Higher Risk for a BRCA Mutation if

- You—or any family members—have had breast cancer before age 50
- Multiple relatives have had breast cancer, or a male relative has had breast cancer
- You—or any family members—have had ovarian cancer
- You are of Ashkenazi Jewish descent and you or any family members have had breast or ovarian cancer
- A family member has a known BRCA mutation
3 Steps Young Women Can Take to Understand their Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer Risk

1. Learn your family history of breast or ovarian cancer. It may indicate you are at a higher risk.

2. Talk to a doctor if you are at a higher risk. Your doctor can help you make a plan for managing your risk.

3. Know how your breasts normally look and feel. Talk to your doctor right away if you notice changes in the size or shape of your breast, pain, or nipple discharge.

Why BRCA Mutations Matter

BREAST CANCER
50% of women with a BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutation will develop breast cancer by the time they turn 70 years old, compared to 7% of women in the general US population.

OVARIAN CANCER
30% of women with a BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutation will develop ovarian cancer by the time they turn 70 years old, compared to less than 1% of women in the general US population.

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention