

Ready to start planning your care? Call us at [646-926-0945](tel:646-926-0945) to make an appointment.

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Memorial Sloan Kettering  
Cancer Center

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The best way to know what screening tests are right for you is to know your risk for cancer. MSK has general guidance for screening tests and when to get them. Factors in your life like health history, genetics, and lifestyle may change the type of screening tests you need and how often to get them.

MSK's [cancer screening guidelines](#) explain cancer screening tests and when you should have them, based on your cancer risk.

## Why you should know your risk for cancer

Your cancer risk means your likely chances of getting a type of cancer. Many things can raise your risk for cancer, such as:

- Your health history.
- Your [family health history](#) .
- Your age.
- Your genes (DNA).
- Your lifestyle (diet, tobacco use, alcohol, and exercise).

Knowing your risk will help you:

- Understand which cancer screening tests you need.
- Know when to start screening.
- Take steps to lower your cancer risk.

## How to know your risk for cancer

Your healthcare provider will ask you questions about your health. They will ask about your [family history](#) . This is health information about close relatives (like your father, mother, sisters, or brothers) related to you by blood, not marriage. Sometimes the questions are asked as part of a survey.

Your answers to these questions can help to define your risk for cancer. It's an estimate of how likely it is that you may get cancer.

Genetic testing is another way to get information about your risk for some types of cancer. Genetic testing looks at your DNA to see if you were born with changes (mutations or variants) in genes. These changes can raise your chances of getting cancer. Genetic testing does not look for cancer. It only tests for changes in genes that may lead to cancer.

MSK's [Clinical Genetics Service](#) has experts who can help you understand and lower your cancer risk.

## Cancer screening

Cancer screening means checking for cancer in people who have no symptoms. Screening can help find cancer early, when it's easier to treat.

Cancer screening tests can include:

- Imaging, such as mammograms and CT scans.
- Lab tests, such as blood and stool (poop) tests.
- Procedures, such as colonoscopies and Pap smear tests.
- A physical exam.

Each screening test has benefits and risks. Experts agree that for most people, screenings have more benefits than risks.

[MSK's cancer screening guidelines](#) help you know which screening tests to have and when to get them. Screening can save lives by lowering the chance of dying from cancer. You can take steps to stay healthy by following these screening guidelines and knowing your risk for cancer.

### [Genetic Counseling and Genetic Testing for Hereditary Cancer at MSK](#)

Genetic counseling and genetic cancer risk assessment are an important part of cancer care. Learn how Memorial Sloan Kettering's genetic counselors, doctors, and researchers guide people through the process of genetic testing and cancer risk assessment.

## [Screening Guidelines](#)

Cancer screening tests are recommended at certain baseline ages to detect cancer in its earliest and most treatable stages. Learn more about Memorial Sloan Kettering's recommended screening guidelines by cancer type.

## [Screening Services](#)

Screening and prevention services that are offered at Memorial Sloan Kettering.