



# SHARSHERET®

The Jewish Breast & Ovarian Cancer Community

**Temple Akiba Sharsheret Panel  
It's a Family Issue: Hereditary Cancer and the Jewish Community  
October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
With Dr. Joshua Cohen and Rachel Shapira, ScM, LCGC**

Sharsheret is a national not for profit cancer support and education organization and does not provide any medical advice or perform any medical procedures. The information provided by Sharsheret is not a substitute for medical advice or treatment for specific medical conditions. You should not use this information to diagnose or treat a health problem. Always seek the advice of your physician or qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.

**The following information is provided by Dr. Joshua Cohen and Rachel Shapira, ScM, LCGC as follow up to questions received during the panel.**

**Please note that they answered all questions to the best of their ability and if you have further questions, you can contact Sharsheret or consult your medical provider.**

**National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC) websites:**

<https://www.findageneticcounselor.com/> national directory of NSGC members, especially helpful to share with relatives who live elsewhere

<https://www.aboutgeneticcounselors.org/> consumer-facing NSGC website

**UCLA Cancer Genetics:**

<https://www.uclahealth.org/cancer-genetics> for more info about the team at UCLA or to make an appointment

**Remaining Questions:**

Does risk for cancer go up with obesity?

Yes, cancer does increase with obesity. Specific cancers such as endometrial/uterine cancer are significantly increased due to obesity's impact on cell function in specific organs. Weight loss can reduce this risk.

What are the chances of getting ovarian cancer if you already got a preventive oophorectomy and salpingectomy?

If you have had your ovaries/tubes completely removed previously, the risk of these cancers is essentially 0%. That being said, there is the risk of primary peritoneal cancer which acts similarly to fallopian tube/ovarian cancer. BRCA mutation carriers for example have a 2-3% lifetime risk of primary peritoneal cancer.

How does the environment and healthy lifestyle behavior impact if and when you develop hereditary cancer.

There is no exact answer to the impact of environment and healthy lifestyle on hereditary cancer. It depends on the mutation in question, specific organ of cancer concern, and the environmental exposure, as well as the healthy lifestyle intervention. I recommend discussing with your doctor. There are certain interventions, such as birth control pills, which can reduce the risk of ovarian cancer.

If you test negative for the BRCA genes, what other risks do Jewish women have?

There are many genes that women are at risk for including Jewish women. Panels now include upwards of 93 genes depending on your family history. I recommend discussing with your doctor or a genetic counselor based on your personal and family history.

Is it safe to get a mammogram, visit my OBGYN or PCP, or get genetic testing now during COVID?

Yes it is safe for all of the above. Wear a mask, wash your hands, practice social distancing. It is a good idea to call a facility or office ahead of your visit and ask what protocols they use to protect patients and staff from COVID-19.

If a parent had pancreatic cancer, what are the odds of me getting it?

It depends on the rest of your family history and risk of genetic predisposition to cancer. I recommend discussing with your doctor or a genetic counselor.

What if you don't know whether you are Ashkenazi or Sephardic? Or if you have both in your family tree? (Or does it even matter?)

Officially, 1 Ashkenazi grandparent is enough to "count" when it comes to meeting BRCA testing criteria. I've met a lot of Jews who don't know because they don't know what Ashkenazi/Sephardic mean. If that's the case, I would just clarify that Ashkenazi = Eastern European.

Do most insurance companies approve genetic testing?

Most do when specific criteria are met, and most use the criteria laid out in the NCCN guidelines (too complex to list all here). Medicare is a little tricky because they require a personal history of cancer, not just a family history. This applies to Medicare Advantage and Supplemental plans as well. BUT Invitae guarantees no cost to patients with Medicare, so a genetic counselor can generally still get testing for unaffected Medicare patients.

Does a 60+ year old post-menopausal woman without children need to bother getting genetic testing?

If her personal and/or family is suspicious for hereditary cancer, it is still recommended as it may change her management. For example, if she had a BRCA mutation, she should get her ovaries and fallopian tubes removed.

What is the timeline between spitting in the tube & learning the results?

About 3 weeks

What are the other genetic mutations that are tested when a panel is done? What about familial polyposis?

It depends on the panel, the ordering provider, and the patient's preferences. There are panels that are specific to breast/ovarian cancer or to colon cancer, but unless my patients specifically do not want a "pan-cancer" panel, I include genes related to all different cancer types, including genes for polyposis. A genetic counselor will typically discuss the different options, like whether to include lower risk or less well understood genes.

If an identical twin was tested, are the results the same for the 2nd twin?

Theoretically, yes. But I still recommend testing the 2nd twin if they have personal or family history that's concerning.

If your mother doesn't have breast cancer but your grandmother did, how important is it to get tested?

Testing may still be indicated, especially if your grandmother was diagnosed at a young age or if it's an Ashkenazi family. Not everyone with a BRCA or other mutation will develop cancer, so a healthy mom doesn't mean that she definitely doesn't have a mutation.

Please click this [link](#) to view the full recording of the webinar.

Email [asax@sharsheret.org](mailto:asax@sharsheret.org) to get hooked up to Sharsheret support,  
Sharsheret's genetic counselor,  
or to bring Sharsheret to your school, doctor's office, or community.

