

## Hereditary Cancer

### Facts:

- Most cancers are sporadic and are largely due to chance and external factors like the environment and lifestyle
- About 20% of cancers are familial, meaning there is a strong history of cancer in a family. Some types of cancer are more strongly familial than others - breast, colon, thyroid and ovarian. Having a family history may increase your risk of breast cancer by 20-40%
- Around 10% of cancers are linked to faulty genetics/genes
- The two most common faulty genes linked to breast cancer are called BRCA 1 and BRCA 2. The faulty BRCA gene can be inherited from either the maternal or paternal side of the family
- Carrying a faulty BRCA gene can increase a person's risk of developing cancer:
  - With the BRCA 1 gene there is an 80% risk of developing breast cancer and a 40% risk of developing ovarian cancer
  - With BRCA 2 there is an 88% risk of developing breast cancer and a 10% risk of developing prostate and ovarian cancer. 1 in 20 male gene carriers develop male breast cancer
- These faulty genes have a 50% chance of being passed on to children of a carrier, male or female.
- Around 559 women in Northern Ireland have been tested positive for the BRCA 1 or 2 gene
- Preventative surgery can be an option for women who carry the BRCA 1 or 2 gene
- Research has shown that in general, exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet can lower your risk of developing cancer. Thirty minutes of daily physical exercise can reduce your risk of breast cancer by at least 20%. Carrying excess weight can increase your risk of cancer – having a body mass index of over 30 increases your risk by 25%

*(This information has been derived from Prof Morrison, Consultant in Genetic medicine, Belfast City Hospital and his genetics team)*

### **Next Steps**

If you are worried about hereditary cancer and fit any of the criteria listed below we recommend that you visit your GP who can assess your situation and where appropriate refer you to a family history clinic (if related to breast cancer) or a genetics clinic at the hospital. They will take a full family history, assess your risk and if necessary carry out genetic testing.

### **Criteria**

- one first degree relative (i.e. mother, father, daughter, sister, brother) diagnosed younger than 40/45 years
- two first degree relatives in their 50's or less (on the same side of the family)
- three first or second degree relatives any age (on the same side of the family)
- one first degree male breast cancer
- a known BRCA gene carrier

### **Support available**

Action Cancer offer free counselling and complementary therapy services to anyone who currently, or in the past, have attended the family history clinic or the genetics clinic.

We recognise that going through the process of genetic testing can be very stressful for the whole family. It can also sometimes be a lengthy process. Our services are there to support you by providing a listening ear and therapies to help you deal with the emotions and stress/tension that you are facing. We do not provide genetic testing but act as an additional support service to you whilst undergoing this process and/or dealing with the emotional effects of gaining the results.

Our support services are available across Northern Ireland in Belfast, Lurgan, Portrush, Coleraine, Derry and Strabane.

### **Breast screening service**

Action Cancer also provides free breast screening to women aged 40-49 and 70+. Breast screening is provided at Action Cancer House, Belfast or on the Big Bus.

To book an appointment for counselling, complementary therapy or breast screening call 02890 803344 or book online at [www.actioncancer.org](http://www.actioncancer.org).