

# BASSER CENTER FOR BRCA

## BLACK BRCA

### COMMON MYTHS ABOUT CANCER AND GENETICS

**MYTH:** Black men and women have equal risk of cancer as white individuals and have the same survival rates.

**FACT:** Studies show inequalities in cancer risks and survival, with blacks often doing worse. For example, black men are 60-80% more likely than white men to be diagnosed with prostate cancer and black women are twice as likely as white women to be diagnosed with triple-negative breast cancer, which is a more aggressive and harder to treat type of breast cancer.<sup>1</sup>

**MYTH:** BRCA mutations are only found among certain races and ethnicities.

**FACT:** *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* mutations, which increase one's risk for certain cancers like breast, ovarian, prostate and pancreatic cancers, are found in people of all races and ethnicities. In the general population, the risk of having a BRCA mutation is 1 in 200 individuals. Some groups have a higher rate of mutations such as people of Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry where the chance is 1 in 40. BRCA mutations know no boundaries.

**MYTH:** If there is no one who carries a BRCA mutation in your family, you don't need to worry about being screened for cancer.

**FACT:** Although having a BRCA mutation is an indicator for increased risk for certain hereditary cancers, it is also important to remember that your family history matters, even without a mutation in a known cancer-causing gene in the family. In addition, most women who are diagnosed with breast cancer don't have a family history. Your healthcare provider and/or a genetic counselor can help you discuss your personal risk factors, including your family history and how these impact your risk of cancer, and recommend appropriate prevention and screening options to help you reduce your cancer risks or detect it early.

**MYTH:** Only women carry BRCA mutations and pass them on to their children.

**FACT:** BRCA mutations are found in both men and women and can also be passed on from mother and/or father to male and female children.

**MYTH:** Women don't need to worry about breast cancer until they are older.

**FACT:** Women found to carry a BRCA mutation have a higher risk of developing cancer at younger ages as compared to women in the general population. If a woman is found to carry a BRCA mutation, breast cancer screening starts at age 25. Even without a BRCA mutation, breast cancer can occur younger than age 50 and black women are more likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer before age 45 than white women.<sup>2</sup> Studies have shown that black women are more likely than white women to be diagnosed with breast cancer at a later stage, which has lower survival rates.

**MYTH:** Getting a genetic test to find out if you or a family member carry a BRCA mutation is a long and expensive process.

**FACT:** Deciding to undergo genetic testing is a personal decision and should be considered in consultation with a genetic counselor or your healthcare provider. To determine if an individual carries a BRCA mutation, a laboratory test is performed on a blood or saliva (spit) sample. The test is usually covered by insurance if the individual meets certain guidelines. In addition, some genetic testing companies and non-profit organizations offer financial assistance for under or uninsured individuals. For many individuals, the benefits of finding out whether they carry a BRCA mutation may far outweigh the potential costs. Testing can also provide the opportunity to identify and test relatives who may carry a mutation — potentially preventing and detecting cancer early in a whole family.





## EARLY DETECTION CAN HELP IMPROVE OUTCOMES

Racial disparities exist in the incidence and survival rates of certain cancers, such as breast and prostate cancer. Compared to white individuals, black men and women are more likely to be diagnosed with certain cancers at an advanced stage when they are more difficult to treat. Although the reason for such disparities varies, early detection continues to be critical in helping improve health outcomes and quality of life for all individuals.



## GENE MUTATIONS INCREASE CANCER RISK

*BRCA1* and *BRCA2* mutations are found in people of all backgrounds. Men and women with a gene mutation in either *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* are at heightened risk for developing certain cancers, including breast, ovarian, prostate and pancreatic cancers. These gene mutations can be passed on to children by either men or women.



## KNOW YOUR GENETIC RISK

Meet with your healthcare provider or genetic counselor to discuss your family history of cancer. It's also important to review other personal risk factors to determine the likelihood for hereditary cancer and the options available to reduce and manage those risks.

The Basser Center and BLACK & BRCA are here to help by providing educational resources tailored to your needs, assistance in finding a genetic counselor, and by offering a community of support.



For more information, visit [basser.org/blackBRCA](https://basser.org/blackBRCA) or call 215.662.2748.

Scan the QR code with your mobile device to contact our office or email [basser.outreach@penntmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:basser.outreach@penntmedicine.upenn.edu).

   @basserBRCA

<sup>1</sup> National Cancer Institute: March 2019, <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/understanding/disparities>

<sup>2</sup> Cancer Facts & Figures for African Americans 2019-2021, <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/cancer-facts-and-figures-for-african-americans/cancer-facts-and-figures-for-african-americans-2019-2021.pdf>

