

# Genetic Counseling

## Important Things to Know

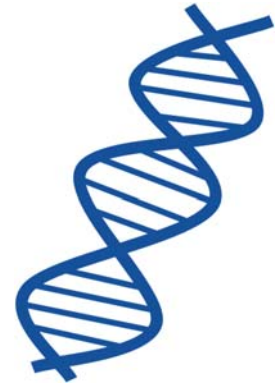
### What is prenatal genetic counseling?

Pregnancy is an exciting, and sometimes overwhelming, time for many expectant parents. The goal of genetic counseling is to provide patients with information, support and resources to better understand the risks of genetic disease. Genetic counselors are members of the health care team with specialized degrees in medical genetics and counseling. As genetic screening and testing has become increasingly complex, your genetic counselor will help you to understand this information and support you through any decision making based on your desires for the pregnancy.

### Who sees a genetic counselor?

There are many reasons someone might see a genetic counselor. Some people may have specific reasons for a genetic counseling appointment while others may be interested in learning more about the general risks for their pregnancy. Some indications for genetic counseling include:

- An ultrasound finding or screening test that suggests the need for additional genetic testing
- A personal or family history of a birth defect or genetic disease
- Age of the mother or the father
- An exposure, such as a virus or a medication, during the pregnancy
- A history of pregnancy loss



### What to expect at your genetic counseling appointment:

Information and assessment	During your appointment, a genetic counselor will review the indication for counseling with you and discuss the specific risks for the pregnancy, as well as available testing options, if indicated. A genetic counselor will explain what the potential results could be as well as what they might mean for the developing fetus, you as the parents and the health care team caring for the pregnancy.
Family History	A full family history is usually obtained as factors in your family history can influence which genetic screening or testing is most appropriate.
Decision-Making	You may get a lot of information during your pregnancy. Your genetic counselor will be able to help you process the information and make informed decisions that are in line with your needs and values for the pregnancy.
Support	Often these conversations can bring up a lot of feelings and emotions for parents. A genetic counselor can help address these concerns, support you through the process, and make a referral for ongoing counseling, if needed.
Follow-up	Your genetic counselor will help to facilitate the genetic testing process and will follow up with you about results. If the results show something of concern, your genetic counselor can help you to understand these results and provide you with additional information and resources. Your genetic counselor will work with the rest of your healthcare team to coordinate referrals to other specialists, as needed.

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### **What kinds of tests will I be offered?**

The type of test that is performed will depend on many factors, including your preferences, gestational age, risks, and the amount of information that is needed. Some examples of tests that are offered through our Center include:

- Screening tests for chromosome abnormalities including first trimester screening, maternal serum screening, or cell free DNA (cfDNA)
- Diagnostic testing, such as an amniocentesis or chorionic villus sampling (CVS)
- Genetic testing for parents such as carrier screening or parental karyotypes

### **How to prepare for a prenatal genetic counseling appointment:**

- Write down any questions about screening or testing options
- Collect as much information as you can about your family history and your partner's family history. For example, consider whether anyone in your family has:
  - o Multiple pregnancy losses
  - o Birth defects requiring surgery as a newborn
  - o Developmental delay or intellectual disabilities
  - o Cancer diagnosed before age 50
  - o Any known genetic conditions

An average genetic counseling session lasts 60 minutes, but may take more or less time to discuss the various concerns and to allow for your questions.

### **Where can I get more information about genetic counseling?**

To reach a prenatal genetic counselor at Johns Hopkins Hospital, please call 410-955-3091.

To reach the Center for Fetal Therapy directly, please call 410-502-6561.

For more information about genetic counseling in general, visit the National Society for Genetic Counselors website at [www.nsgc.org](http://www.nsgc.org)