
Department of Medical Genetics

Genetic Counselling

Genetic counselling is a branch of medicine. Genetic counselling may be offered by a doctor who specialises in genetics or by a genetic counsellor. Genetic counsellors are health professionals who have undergone specialist training following either a university degree in genetics or a related science or following qualification as a nurse or midwife.

This leaflet explains what to expect at a genetic counselling appointment.

What is genetic counselling?

Some conditions run in families and many conditions have a genetic basis to them. Genetic counsellors can give people information about these conditions, how they are inherited and which family members may be affected. They can also discuss the care of patients with genetic disorders and any choices that may be available to them to help reduce the impact of their disorder.

Who needs genetic counselling?

Anyone who is concerned about a condition in their family that they think may be inherited.

Many people want to know their own chance of inheriting or passing on the genetic condition in their family. Quite often people find that their risks of an inherited disorder are quite low and are reassured by this information.

Some people affected by a genetic condition benefit from specialist care and genetic counsellors can arrange appropriate appointments with other specialists.

Sometimes a paediatrician will suggest a genetic assessment for a child who may have a genetic condition. Not all genetic disorders are inherited from parents as they can arise spontaneously in a child with no previous family history. It is still helpful to understand whether or not the condition is genetic as this may help in the medical care of the affected child and may have implications for other children in the family.

It is possible to test for some genetic conditions during pregnancy and couples planning a pregnancy where there is a genetic disorder in the family and may wish to discuss these tests.

What will happen at my appointment?

Consultations usually last between 30 and 60 minutes depending on the nature of the referral from the health care professional.

We will discuss your concerns and draw your family tree, including the medical details of your relatives such as their diagnosis and, for deceased relatives, the cause and age of their death. We may write to you before your appointment asking for certain information. It is very useful if you can make a note of additional details before you come to the clinic or can bring with you a relative who knows these details. We would, of course, never approach one of your relatives without your permission to do so.

We will then assess the likelihood that you may be affected by a genetic disorder and discuss any choices available to you to help reduce its impact. We will try to help you to understand this using everyday language and will answer any questions you may have.

Will any tests be done at my appointment?

We may suggest a blood sample but it is highly unlikely that we would suggest any other test at your first appointment. If other tests would be helpful, we will discuss these with you and then make arrangements for these to take place later if you would like to go ahead.

Finally

We aim to give you information that you may find helpful in making your own decisions. We will also discuss all choices available to you but we will not tell you what we think you should do or should not do.

Please bring any questions or concerns with you to your appointment. Feel free to write them down if you wish.

If you need more advice about any aspect of genetic counselling, you are welcome to contact:

East Anglian Genetic Service, Box 134, Addenbrooke's Hospital Trust, Hills Road,
Cambridge CB2 2QQ

Tel: 01223 216446

Fax 01223 217054

This leaflet is based on an original leaflet written by the Clinical Genetics Department, Guy's Hospital, London



We are currently working towards a smoke-free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS Stop Smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or

patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



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