Is breast cancer inherited?
Breast cancer is not usually inherited but is often related to a combination of exposures, lifestyle and aging.
About 5 - 10% of breast cancer is considered hereditary, because of a mutation (change) in one single gene, which can be passed to a child from a mother or a father.

What factors increase the likelihood that my breast cancer is hereditary?
• Breast cancer diagnosed younger than 50 years old
• 3 or more affected women in the same family
• Having breast cancer twice
• Having breast cancer in both breasts under the age of 50
• History of ovarian cancer
• Triple negative breast cancer under the age of 60
• A male with breast cancer in the family
• Having Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry
• Family history of ovarian, pancreatic or aggressive prostate cancer

If I’ve had breast cancer, are my relatives at risk?
Usually not, but to assess the risk, it helps to look at the whole family, starting with who has had cancer, what type, and their age.
Why should I consider genetic testing?
If you or a family member meets any of the hereditary factors associated with breast cancer, you should consider genetic testing. If you were tested prior to 2014, you may want to consider being retested. Prior to 2014, most tests only included the 2 most common genes, BRCA1 & BRCA2. Since then, at least 7 additional genes related to hereditary breast cancer have been added to genetic testing.

The results of genetic testing can help your healthcare providers determine the best way to lower your risk of getting cancer. It may also help with treatment if you already have a cancer diagnosis. Results may make it possible to determine if your close relatives also have an increased chance of being diagnosed with cancer.

Will my insurance cover genetic testing?
Most insurances will cover genetic testing if you meet certain criteria having to do with the type of cancer and age at diagnosis. Check with your insurance plan for a full list of criteria.

How should I prepare for a genetic counseling appointment?
You should collect information regarding relatives with cancer (i.e. type, age when the diagnosis was made, treatment). If a relative had genetic testing, try to obtain a copy of the report.

What happens at a genetic counseling appointment?
The genetic counselor will review your medical history, family history and discuss appropriate testing, including cost and insurance coverage. A sample collection of blood and/or saliva may be taken if you decide to proceed with testing.

Can I go to a genetic counseling appointment and not have testing?
YES. A genetic counseling appointment is an opportunity for you to learn about testing. After hearing the information, some people decide that it's not the right time for them to have testing. Others decide to go home and consider their options, and discuss with family members. Some people are certain that they want to have testing, and we can often collect a sample and send it out the day of the appointment.

How long does it take to get test results?
It typically takes 2-3 weeks.

How will I get my test results?
We prefer that you return to our office to get your results in person. Results can also be communicated by a phone call.

If testing shows that I have a genetic change related to cancer, will I definitely get cancer?
No. Your likelihood to have cancer will increase, but not everyone carrying a mutation will develop cancer. For some gene mutations, the risk of breast cancer is 30% and for others it may be as high as 80%.

What should I do if I find out I carry a hereditary cancer gene mutation?
Your genetic counselor will advise you on what your next steps are. These may include:
- More testing, more often, such as a mammography, MRI and/or a clinical breast exam
- Chemoprevention: the use of medication to lower the risk or prevent cancer in healthy people
- Surgery such as bilateral mastectomy or removing your ovaries

I’ve seen testing advertised that I can do by just sending a saliva sample on my own. Why should I see a genetic counselor if I can do the test myself?
Direct-to-Consumer (DTC) testing may not cover the specific condition that is present in your family. Also, it is recommended that testing done in DTC labs be verified by a clinical lab.

To learn more about the Breast Health Center, call 516.663.3887
To schedule a genetic counseling appointment, call 516.663.2657