

Breast cancer genes a real risk for men, too

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(HealthDay)—Few American men are screened for gene mutations that can greatly increase their risk of breast and other types of cancers, a new study reveals.

BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene mutations put women at high risk for breast and [ovarian cancers](#), but these mutations also increase men's risk for certain cancers.

"If a male has a BRCA mutation, their risk of breast cancer increases 100-fold," said senior study author Dr. Christopher Childers. He is a resident physician in the department of surgery at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Medicine.

"But it's not just breast cancer—BRCA mutations put men at higher risk for often aggressive prostate cancers that occur at younger ages," Childers added in a university news release.

"These mutations have also been associated with other cancers, such as pancreatic cancer and melanoma [skin cancer]," he noted. "It is therefore very important that men at risk of a BRCA mutation get genetic testing, as it can potentially help them detect future cancers and help physicians tailor cancer treatment if they do."

For the new study, Childers and his colleagues analyzed data from the 2015 U.S. National Health Interview Survey. The investigators found that nearly 2.5 million people had received cancer genetic testing. Of those people, nearly three times as many women had testing compared to men—73 percent versus 27 percent, respectively.

Further analysis revealed that the rate of testing for BRCA gene mutations in men was one-tenth that of women. There was no gender disparity in other types of cancer gene tests, the findings showed.

The study was published April 26 in the journal *JAMA Oncology*.

Further research is needed to learn why so few men get tested for BRCA gene [mutations](#) and how to increase their rates, said study lead author

Kimberly Childers. She is a genetic counselor and regional manager of the Providence Health and Services Southern California's clinical genetics and genomics program.

"Previous studies have shown that men don't necessarily understand the importance of a breast/ovarian [cancer gene mutation](#)—that it is more of a 'feminine' issue—but this couldn't be further from the truth," she said. "We hope this study will spur broad national educational efforts."

More information: The U.S. National Cancer Institute has more on [male breast cancer](#).

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