If you know that one type of cancer seems to run in your family, you may wish to contact the genetic counseling program offered by the SLUCare Division of Hematology and Oncology at Saint Louis University Hospital. This comprehensive, confidential program can help you and your family members identify your cancer risks, take steps that may help reduce the risk and undergo screenings to detect cancer in its early stages. Intensive education and counseling are important parts of the program.

**Environmental risk factors**
There are chemicals or substances used in workplaces that may put you at increased risk for developing some cancers. For instance, asbestos and radon are linked with a higher cancer risk. Try to reduce your exposure to these substances and always wear protective equipment when it is available.

**Medical risk factors**
Certain health conditions may increase your risk for some cancers. Among these are colon polyps (abnormal tissue growths in the lining of the bowel) and previous cancer. Be sure to tell your doctor about these conditions, so the best choices for cancer screening can be made.

**EARLY DETECTION INCREASES YOUR CHANCES**
Many times, the earlier cancer is diagnosed and treated, the better a person’s chances are for full recovery. Cancer in its earliest stages rarely has warning signs, so take the steps that will give you an added edge for early detection:

- Get regular checkups by your doctor – Often your doctor can find early cancer during a physical exam or with routine tests, even if you have no symptoms. Ask your doctor about your cancer risk, problems to watch for and a schedule of regular checkups.
- Ask to be screened for cancer – Research shows that Pap tests, mammograms and colon cancer tests save lives.
- Do regular self-exams – There are exams you can do on a regular basis that can help you detect cancer.
  - Check your skin regularly for new growths; sores that don’t heal; changes in the size, shape or color of moles; or any other changes on your skin. Report these warning signs to your doctor at once.
  - Look in a mirror to check the inside of your mouth for changes in the color of your lips, gums, tongue or inner cheeks. Also look for scabs, cracks, sores, white patches, swelling or bleeding. Have these symptoms checked by a doctor or dentist.
  - If you are a man, regularly do a testicular self-exam. Report a lump or other changes, such as heaviness, swelling, and unusual tenderness or pain to your doctor.
  - If you are a woman, do a breast self-examination every month. This will help you learn what looks and feels normal for your breasts and will help you notice any changes. Report anything you feel is not normal to your doctor.

**BE AWARE OF SYMPTOMS**
While you are taking the steps to stay cancer-free, you need to keep aware of the symptoms that may be associated with cancer. These are:

- Changes in bowel or bladder habits
- A sore that does not heal
- Unusual bleeding or discharge
- Thickening or a lump in the breast or any other part of your body
- Indigestion or difficulty swallowing
- Obvious change in a wart or mole
- Nagging cough or hoarseness

Remember, these symptoms do not always mean cancer, and only your doctor can make a diagnosis. Report these symptoms to your healthcare provider promptly.

**SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY CANCER CENTER**
Our standing as an academic medical center puts us at the forefront in developing and providing the latest medical treatment and procedures for cancer patients. For more information on the programs available through the Saint Louis University Cancer Center, call (314) 268-7015 or toll-free (866) 977-4440. Or visit the Grand Vision Cancer Information Center located on the first floor of the Cancer Center.
THERE IS GOOD NEWS ABOUT CANCER
The good news is that there’s a lot you can do to prevent it. By making changes in your lifestyle – the way you eat, staying away from tobacco products, avoiding the sun – you can significantly reduce your risk of developing cancer. And even if you are at higher risk because cancer runs in your family, there are things you can do to decrease your chances of getting the disease.

This brochure will give you suggestions to help prevent cancer. Let’s start by answering a basic question.

WHAT IS CANCER?
People get cancer when, for reasons that aren’t yet known, cells within their bodies divide without control or order. The body is made up of many types of cells, and it is normal for them to grow, divide and produce more cells when the body needs them. Cancer occurs when cells keep dividing, even when new cells are not needed. The mass of extra cells may produce a tumor that can be:

• Benign (not cancer) – Benign tumors are rarely life-threatening, and they do not spread to other parts of the body. They often can be removed and usually do not grow back.
• Malignant (cancer) – Malignant tumors can invade, damage and destroy nearby tissues and spread to other parts of the body.

YOUR RISKS FOR DEVELOPING CANCER – AND HOW TO REDUCE THEM
Even though it is not known why cancer occurs, there is proof that certain things can increase your chance of developing the disease. These things are called cancer risk factors, and they fall into four broad categories, which may overlap. In some cancers, different risk factors may work together to increase your cancer risk.

Lifestyle or behavioral risk factors
The factors that fall into this category are the ones you have the most control over. By following these guidelines, you can significantly reduce your risk of developing cancer.

• Don’t use tobacco products – Scientists know that smoking and using smokeless tobacco are directly linked to many kinds of cancer.
  - If you don’t smoke, never start.
  - If you do smoke, quit. The chances of getting lung cancer gradually decrease once you stop smoking.
  - Avoid breathing secondhand smoke, which increases your risk for heart and lung diseases, including cancer.

• Avoid harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays – UV radiation from the sun and other sources such as sunlamps and tanning booths is the main cause of skin cancer.
  - Avoid being in the sun when ultraviolet rays are strongest. During the summer, that is from about 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. A general rule is to avoid the sun when your shadow is shorter than you are.
  - Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. You want to use one that blocks UVA and UVB rays.
  - Zinc oxide, or titanium dioxide, may offer good protection to sensitive areas such as the nose, ears, cheeks and shoulders.
  - Wear protective clothing to help block the sun’s rays. Examples of good choices are hats, long-sleeved shirts and dark-colored clothing made of tightly woven fabrics.

• Maintain a healthy diet – Research points to a link between a high-fat diet and certain cancers, such as cancer of the breast, colon, uterus and prostate. The good news is studies suggest that foods containing fiber and certain nutrients help protect against some cancers.
  - Eat a lot of fruits and vegetables, grains and beans. Try to eat them five or more times a day.
  - Include lean meat and low-fat dairy products in your diet.
  - Don’t eat a lot of fat.
  - Stay at a healthy weight.
  - Most days, include in your routine 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity.
  - Consider taking a multivitamin containing folic acid, particularly if you drink alcohol daily.

• Use alcohol in moderation – Drinking large amounts of alcohol increases your risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus and larynx. If you smoke and drink, you are at especially high risk of getting these cancers. Alcohol also can damage your liver and increase your risk of liver cancer. Some studies suggest drinking may also increase the risk of breast cancer.
  - Don’t have more than one or two drinks a day.

• Radiation – Exposure to large doses of radiation from medical X-rays can increase your cancer risk. However, X-rays used for diagnosis expose you to very little radiation, and the benefits nearly always outweigh the risks.
  - Talk with your doctor or dentist about the need for each X-ray.
  - Ask about the use of shields to protect other parts of your body.

HEREDITARY RISK FACTORS
You are more likely to get cancer when an altered or changed gene is passed on to you from one of your parents. This link between genes and cancer is often strongest in families where:

• Cancer develops at a much younger age than average
• Cancer develops in more than one generation
• More than one type of cancer develops in the same close relative
• Cancer develops in both breasts
• Breast cancer develops in a man
• Cancer develops in several close relatives
• Several rare cancers develop in a family

In this family tree the circles represent females and the squares represent males. The filled symbols represent family members diagnosed with a cancer. This family tree suggests a hereditary predisposition for developing breast cancer.

With a strong family history of cancer, the daughter and son in generation A may want to consider genetic testing. Their mother developed early breast cancer (generation B). Their mother’s paternal aunt developed ovarian cancer and a maternal uncle developed prostate cancer (Great Aunt and Great Uncle in generation C). In addition, a great grandmother also developed early breast cancer (generation D). While the grandfather in generation C did not develop cancer, he probably had a genetic predisposition for developing breast cancer.

Several rare cancers develop in a family