

Resources and Referrals

The prenatal genetic counselors at Desert Perinatal Associates are active in the Las Vegas medical community. Often, they work with other genetic counselors and physicians that specialize in pediatrics or adult medicine to ensure that each patient and their family receives comprehensive healthcare. In particular, the genetic counselors at Desert Perinatal Associates have a working relationship with the pediatric geneticist and genetic counselors at the University Medical Center. They work closely with several of the fertility specialists in Las Vegas and can identify couples that may benefit from a consult. Desert Perinatal Associates also offers grief counseling, which is provided by a nurse practitioner certified in clinical psychiatry. Interested patients will also be provided with the most up-to-date educational resources and contact information for national and local support sources.

If you are wondering whether you may be eligible for genetic counseling speak with your physician and ask for a referral. The genetic counselors at Desert Perinatal Associates are also available if you have further questions.



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A
helpful
guide
to
Genetic
Counseling

Jennifer is pregnant at age 35 and she has heard that there is an increased risk for birth defects. Now she has many questions. Sarah has experienced her third, unexplained miscarriage. She is worried about becoming pregnant again. Eric is planning a family, but his brother was born with a heart defect. He is wondering whether he should be concerned. A prenatal genetic counselor can help all of these families by discussing their history, providing education, assessing risk, exploring available testing options, and offering support.



What is Genetic Counseling?

Genetic counseling is a healthcare service that provides individuals and families with useful information on genetics and inheritance. This complex information is presented in a way that is easy to understand. A genetic counselor will gather information on a woman's health, pregnancy history, and family history to better determine the chance for disease onset or



recurrence. This information can also guide a discussion on testing options and management before or during a woman's pregnancy. This information allows the patient to decide which testing options are best suited to her needs. The goal of genetic counseling is to provide helpful information so the patient and/or family can make the best decision, based on their personal beliefs and values. A genetic counselor will also provide emotional support and understanding during what can be a difficult and confusing time.

Who are Genetic Counselors?

Genetic counselors are healthcare professionals with a specialized graduate degree in medical genetics and counseling. Their training focuses on human and medical genetics, psychosocial counseling skills, public

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health, and clinical education. They receive certification through the American Board of Genetic Counseling to ensure their qualifications and continuing education.

The genetic counselors at Desert Perinatal Associates come from diverse backgrounds and are either board certified or board eligible. They strive to provide their patients with the most up-to-date information and testing options. They work closely with the physicians, nurses, and sonographers, in order to provide complete patient care.

Who is eligible for Genetic Counseling?

Genetic counseling is becoming an increasingly important component in the healthcare experience as our knowledge of genetics expands. Some common reasons to see a genetic counselor before or during pregnancy include:

- Over age 35 at delivery
- Abnormal test result or ultrasound finding
- Family history of a genetic condition (i.e., mental retardation)
- Medication use or other exposure during pregnancy
- History of repeated miscarriage or stillbirth
- Previous pregnancy with an abnormality

The ideal time to see a genetic counselor is before pregnancy. In this way, certain tests can be completed ahead of time, medications may be adjusted, and information on family history can be collected for an accurate picture of risk during future pregnancies.

The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) has recently recommended that all pregnant women be offered screening and diagnostic testing options in order to learn more about their risk for certain birth defects.

What happens during a Genetic Counseling session?

Typically, a genetic counseling session is scheduled for one hour. The genetic counselor will complete a detailed history on your personal health and



pregnancy. Then they will record information on your family history, going back at least three generations (parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.). This information will explain how your family's health can affect your children. Carrier screening for various genetic conditions may also be offered based on your

ethnic background. The genetic counselor will spend time interpreting your medical information or test results, review the risks, and explain the genetic factors behind these conditions.

The aim of a prenatal *genetic counseling* session is to provide each patient with an accurate view of her pregnancy risk, which is often lower than many



first believe. If you are interested in learning more about specific birth defects during pregnancy, the genetic counselor may offer additional blood work or diagnostic tests. In this way, you can make an informed decision about your pregnancy management.

Preconception genetic counseling will benefit many couples. A couple's family history concerns can be addressed prior to pregnancy to determine the risk of recurrence in their children. Couples that have experienced multiple miscarriages or other pregnancy loss may be offered additional genetic testing and screening. Women with preexisting medical conditions (i.e., diabetes, seizure disorder), can meet with a genetic counselor to discuss their health history and medication use before conception.