

Breast Cancer Risk Communication Scripts

This resource was developed by the American Cancer Society National Breast Cancer Roundtable (ACS NBCRT) to support providers in conducting breast cancer risk assessment. This document includes best practices and brief scripts to aid in conversations with patients about breast cancer risk. Each script is tailored to a different scenario based on timing and risk assessment results. These scripts are intended as a starting point for providers and can be adapted to fit the specific patient and context.

See the digital toolkit <https://nbcrt.org/risk-assessment-toolkit/> for more breast cancer risk assessment resources.

Best Practices for Talking to Patients About Risk

1. **Tailor Information.** Share personalized risk information,¹ and use accessible language for different levels of health literacy.² Offer materials in multiple languages,² and use a medical interpreter when needed.³
2. **Share results in multiple formats.** This includes both quantitative and qualitative information,⁴ as well as both verbal and visual information.⁵
3. **Be sensitive and empathetic** in all communication.⁶ This includes being culturally competent and sensitive to different gender identities.⁷
4. **Provide space for patient questions.** Offer a way for patients to directly contact relevant health care professionals with risk questions after the appointment.¹

Script 1: Discussing Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Options

I'd like to take a closer look at your breast cancer risk. To do this, I would like to ask about your personal and family history, which helps determine if you need additional screening or risk-reducing steps. We may use a tool to evaluate your risk and make screening recommendations. It's not a test or procedure – it's just to review your health information so we can figure out appropriate screening and prevention strategies.

To start, I would like to ask you some background questions and then complete the assessment after our appointment. Then, at a follow-up appointment, we can talk about the next steps that feel right for you. Do you have any questions or concerns? *[Discuss any concerns, and if the patient is still hesitant, offer some materials for them to take home.]*

Script 2: Discussing Average Breast Cancer Risk

At our last appointment, we agreed to do an assessment to better understand how your personal history, family history, and other factors impact your breast cancer risk. Your results indicate that your breast cancer risk is similar to the general population. Based on this, we will follow standard screening guidelines for your age. However, it's important to continue discussing any new personal or family health changes over time, as your risk may evolve. Do you have any questions I can answer at this point?

(See the [American Cancer Society Recommendations for the Early Detection of Breast Cancer](#).)

Script 3: Discussing Elevated Breast Cancer Risk

At our last appointment, we agreed to do an assessment to better understand how your personal history, family history, and other factors impact your breast cancer risk. I have the results with me. May I share them with you?

Based on the risk assessment, your results indicate an elevated risk of breast cancer. This does not mean you will develop cancer, but it does mean we should consider additional screening strategies. Let's go over the options together so we can find what works best for you.

(Note: if the patient meets high-risk criteria) I'd also like to recommend annual breast MRI in addition to mammography (See the [American Cancer Society Recommendations for the Early Detection of Breast Cancer](#)).

Do you have any questions about the results or next steps? Would you like access to any additional support resources?

I can always answer questions in future appointments, and you can reach me at _____ if something comes up before then.

Script 4: Following Up on Elevated Breast Cancer Risk (Via Phone or In Person)

Have you had a chance to review the materials from our last visit and think about how you'd like to proceed? It's important to follow the recommended screening schedule and let us know if your personal or family health history changes, as risk factors can evolve over time. Would you like to discuss any updates or concerns today?

References

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