

FAMILY HEALTH HISTORY

As researchers learn more about diseases and conditions that have a hereditary component, documenting your family health history is taking on new importance. Knowing about diseases that run in your family, such as heart disease, diabetes, depression or cancer, could lead to prevention or an early diagnosis and treatment. For instance, if you know there's a history of breast cancer in your family, your doctor may recommend having mammograms or MRI scans earlier.

A family health history is the simplest, most cost-effective way to begin to understand your family's health risks.

Marshfield Clinic genetics experts offer the following tips for recording your family health history to share with other members of your family and your family doctor or genetic counselor.

1. Document health information for three generations, if possible. Start with yourself, any children, your parents and immediate family (brothers and sisters). Next, move on to relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. For a more comprehensive health history, you can add your spouse and three generations of his/her family.
2. Capture as much information as possible and be accurate about birth defects, developmental disabilities and diseases diagnosed in the family. If possible, document at what age the conditions began and ages of death. Include common as well as more rare conditions that may exist in the family. It is equally important to document relatives who lived to an old age and were healthy. It also is helpful to include the countries of origin for your ancestors. (For example, did your grandparents come from England, Japan, Mexico?)
3. Document exposure to environmental influences. For example, do any family members smoke, work with chemicals or live near industries that involve chemicals?
4. Keep the information filed in a safe place at home, on paper or on your computer, and update it every year as the family grows and changes. Also put a copy in a safe deposit box.
5. Pass along the information to others in your family and to your children.
6. The following Family Health History work sheet should be filled out by you for each family member. Share a copy of the completed form with your doctor or genetic counselor at your next medical visit. To find a genetic counselor in your region, go to the National Society of Genetic Counselors' Web site at www.nsgc.org.



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FAMILY HEALTH HISTORY WORK SHEET

Name of family member _____ Sex: Male Female

Relationship to you _____ Date of birth _____

Mother's side of family Father's side of family Does not apply Age _____ Date of death _____

HEALTH CONDITIONS: (Note at what age the condition began)

- Diseases/medical conditions _____

- Is the family member (Check all that apply, if any): Extremely overweight Extremely underweight Very tall Very short
- Birth defects (List all, if any) _____

- Developmental disabilities (List all, such as learning or physical disabilities) _____

- Surgeries (List types of surgeries and reasons for them) _____

- Allergies (List all known allergies) _____

- Miscarriages, stillbirths or infant deaths (List all, if any, and list cause, if known) _____

ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES AND ANCESTRAL ORIGINS:

- Environmental exposures (Does the family member smoke, drink, work with chemicals or live near industries that involve chemicals/toxins?)

- Countries of origin (Where did your family members come from? Example: England, Japan or Mexico)

Information recorded by _____ Date _____

Dates updated _____