



Family matters

HER HEART
community



*What your
family's health
history can
tell you and
your doctor*



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Why is my family health history important?

Many medical conditions—for example, heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers—have a genetic component, which means that they can run in families. If a family member has ever had one of these conditions, you are said to have a “positive family history,” and you may be at increased risk for the condition as well. Even your racial or ethnic background can affect your risk for certain conditions. Your doctor can tell whether your family history puts you at higher risk for any conditions.

It’s important to get all the health information you can about your parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, and uncles. Information about your nieces and nephews as well as your own children may also be useful.¹ It is also important that the information you get is as accurate as possible to avoid overestimating or underestimating your risk.

How important is my family history to my risk for heart disease?

Heart disease is the number one killer of men and women in the United States.² The majority of people who get coronary heart disease at an earlier-than-expected age have a positive family history of premature heart disease.³ If one or more of your family members have had a heart attack at an early age—55 years for men or 65 years for women—you may have a higher risk of having one, too.^{4,5}

People who have a positive family history for early heart disease may have an increased risk for atherosclerosis⁵—a condition in which certain substances, including cholesterol and calcium, build up inside the arteries that supply your heart with blood.

How can knowing my family history help?

Obviously, you can’t control your family history. But if you know that a condition has been present in a family member, you should be more aware of it and try to address other risk factors that you can control.^{4,5} For example, if your family history is positive for heart disease, it may be especially important to reduce other heart disease risk factors, such as smoking, high blood pressure, diabetes, or obesity.^{4,5}

How do I get my family history?

Ask your family members about their health issues. You can contact them individually or even talk about family health history at family gatherings.¹ Even if you don’t get all the information you need from these discussions, they may at least point you in the right direction to learn more. Family medical records and death certificates are great sources of information when available.¹

What diseases run in families?

In addition to heart disease, other fairly common conditions and diseases that may have a genetic component include diabetes; stroke; hypertension (high blood pressure); high cholesterol; breast, ovarian, colon, and prostate cancers; vision or hearing loss; and dementia.^{6,7} Other diseases can also run in families, so carefully review your family health history with your doctor to determine whether or not it affects your risk.

Where can I learn more about family history and health?

More information about gathering family health history is available from the following sources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
<http://www.cdc.gov/genomics/fHix.htm>
- US Department of Health and Human Services
<http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory>

*Your doctor can
tell whether your
family history
puts you at
higher risk for
any conditions.*

*Some conditions
to discuss:*

Heart disease

High blood pressure

Diabetes

Stroke

High cholesterol

Breast cancer

Ovarian cancer

Colon cancer

Vision or hearing loss

Dementia



Share your family health history with your doctor



Print this form, fill it in as fully and accurately as you can, and give it to your doctor at your next visit. The more information doctors have, the better they can care for their patients.

Family Member	Ethnic Background	Current Age	Major Illnesses	Age at Onset	Cause of Death	Age at Death
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Immediate family

Mother						
Father						
Sister(s)						
Brother(s)						

Mother's side

Grandmother						
Grandfather						
Aunt(s)						
Uncle(s)						

Father's side

Grandmother						
Grandfather						
Aunt(s)						
Uncle(s)						

Additional notes about your family health history

References

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The information contained in this brochure does not take the place of discussions between you and your physician.

This information is provided as an educational service by:



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