



Family History is Your Family's Story

Family Health History



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Brought to you by  National Society of Genetic Counselors

Importance of Family Health History

You may have shared some of your family's stories from the past, but you probably have not discussed your uncle's last colonoscopy results, or the heart surgery your grandmother had when she was 15. However, knowing the details of your family members' health history is extremely important when learning about your own risks for disease. By learning about and recording your own family health history, you are taking the first step in learning your risk for different medical issues and working with your physicians to manage these risks.

Getting Started

Starting the conversation may seem overwhelming, but there are simple steps that you can follow to learn more about your family health history.

A good way to start is to list out your biological or blood-related family members, including you, your brothers and sisters, your children and your parents. If possible, you should also include your nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins. If any of these relatives have passed away, record the age they were when they died and their cause of death. (Their health histories are just as important.)

Key Things to Ask About

You should try to gather information about each person's medical history and approximately how old they were when they were found to have each issue. Try to get as many details as possible about the condition.

It is also important to know if anyone has had a medical genetic test, what it was for, and the results of that testing.

You may also take this opportunity to ask about ancestry- where each side of the family came from before the United States. It can also be a great time to learn some of your family's non-medical stories, such as how your parents met or about the birth of your niece or nephew.

Putting a Family Health History to Work

Once you have collected this information, make sure to keep it in a safe place. It is also a good idea to update your family's medical history at least once a year. Holidays and family gatherings can be a great time to catch up with family and update your family health history.

Sharing your family health history with your doctor or genetic counselor is recommended in order to use it to estimate your risks for disease, and to discuss appropriate management and risk-reduction strategies.



My Family Health History

Medical Issue	Who?	What?	How old?
Cancer			
Heart abnormalities			
Diabetes			
Mental illness			
Stroke			
Birth defects*			
Kidney disease			
Learning problems			
Intellectual disabilities			
Autism			
Vision or hearing loss			
Multiple pregnancy losses			
Infertility			
Early/late puberty			
Young/early deaths (including infant deaths)			
Very tall or short stature			
Unexplained medical conditions			
Unique skin spots or patterns*			
A known genetic syndrome			
A condition that seems to run in the family			

*Birth defects can include spina bifida, cleft palate, heart defects, hole in the heart/hole in the lip etc.

*Skin spots or patterns can include cafe-au-laits, shagreen patches, port wine stains, etc.

Previous genetics testing _____

Ancestry (all grandparents) _____