



Family History and Your Health



Why is Family History Important?

Relatives share more than brown eyes or curly hair. Chronic illnesses and other health problems also tend to run in families. Family members share many of the same genes, lifestyles and environments—all the factors that work together to determine health.

Knowing your family's health history can give you important clues to unlock your past for a healthier future!



What Do You Look For?

Look for these “red flags” when asking about your family's health history:

- ◆ Cancer in 2 or more family members
- ◆ Heart attacks before the age of 55 in a man or 65 in a woman
- ◆ Sudden unexplained death under age 40
- ◆ Other chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or osteoporosis

Other important information:

- ◆ Ancestry (different ethnic groups have an increased risk of certain diseases)
- ◆ Age a family member was diagnosed with a condition
- ◆ Age and cause of death
- ◆ Number of family members affected

What Can You Do?

1 Talk about it....

- ◆ Let your family know that diseases like cancer, diabetes, and heart disease can run in families
- ◆ Find out what conditions are in your family and how old people were when they were diagnosed and/or died

2 Write it down....

- ◆ Record your family's health history. Go to www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/ to download the U.S Surgeon General's family history form
- ◆ Update your information as changes occur
- ◆ Try to include information on at least 3 generations

3 Pass it on!

- ◆ Tell your health care provider about diseases in your family
- ◆ Ask whether you need to be screened
- ◆ Share the information with your children and others in your family

For More Information

Michigan's Genetics Resource Center
www.MIGeneticsConnection.org

Michigan Department of Community Health Genomics Program
1-866-852-1247 or email genetics@michigan.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/genomics.public.htm
(Click on Family History)



Genetic Alliance
www.geneticalliance.org

(Click on Genetic Resources, then Family History Tools)