

February 2013

February: Family Health History

History for Your Health

Collecting Family History to Prevent Disease

Many people collect their family history for a hobby. Did you know it might help save your life, too? Your doctor can use your family's health history to help figure out your risk of developing cancer, heart disease, asthma, diabetes, depression, and many other diseases and conditions. If you don't know your family's health history, now's the time to start collecting it. Americans know that family history is important to health. A recent survey found that 96 percent of Americans believe that knowing their family history is important. Yet, the same survey found that only one-third of Americans have ever tried to gather and write down their family's health history.

The Surgeon General recognizes the importance of family health history and a free web-enabled program is now available. It runs on any computer that is connected to the Web and running an up-to-date version of any major Internet browser. The new version of the tool offers numerous advantages over previous versions, which had to be downloaded to the user's computer. The Web-based tool helps users organize family history information and then print it out for presentation to their family doctor. In addition, the tool helps users save their family history information to their own computer and even share family history information with other family members. Access the My Family Health Portrait Web tool at <https://familyhistory.hhs.gov/>.

Millions of dollars in medical research, equipment, and knowledge can't give us the information that this simple tool can. That family history is important isn't new. Every young doctor learns that it's a valuable tool to help figure out which diseases to watch for in patients.

Gathering enough family history information to make useful predictions, however, isn't always easy. Health care providers are often pressed for time and patients don't know the details of what diseases run in their families. "My Family Health Portrait" can help you gather and record important health information before your medical appointments.

After you enter details about your grandparents, parents, siblings, children, aunts, uncles, and cousins, the program will print a diagram that your health provider can use to design personalized diagnosis, treatment, and prevention plans.

Source: *NIH News in Health*

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http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2005/June2005/docs/01features_02.htm#feature02

National Family History Day

Each year since 2004, the Surgeon General has declared Thanksgiving to be National Family History Day. Americans know that family history is important to health. A recent survey found that 96 percent of Americans believe that knowing their family history is important.

Over the holiday or at other times when families gather, the Surgeon General encourages Americans to talk about, and to write down, the health problems that seem to run in their family. Learning about their family's health history may help ensure a longer, healthier future together. For information on other activities of the Office of the Surgeon General, please visit www.surgeongeneral.gov.

Source: US Department of Health and Human Services

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<http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/index.html>

Update Your Doctor on Your Family's Health

A recent study suggests that it's a good idea to tell your doctor if close family members develop cancer. It might affect the types of cancer screening tests your doctor recommends.

Your family's medical history is one of the best tools for predicting your risk for developing cancer and other disorders. That's why doctors usually ask about your family's health the first time you visit.

NIH-funded researchers across the country set out to learn how changes in family history might affect a patient's cancer risk and the screening tests recommended by standard guidelines. They combed through family health data collected over a decade from more than 11,000 people who had a personal or family history of cancer. Their study focused on colon, breast and prostate cancers. Family history of these cancers may warrant earlier screening or more sensitive tests than those recommended for other people. The analysis showed that family histories of cancer change significantly when people are between ages 30 and 50 years. The researchers recommend that doctors maintain accurate information for their patients by getting a comprehensive family history by age 30, and then updating it at least every 5 to 10 years.

"Many patients make lists of questions for the doctor before their appointments, and we hope they add changes to their family history to those lists," says lead researcher Dr. Sharon Plon of Baylor College of Medicine. "Our results are relevant for all patients, since anyone may have a change that would affect their cancer screening recommendations."

Source: *NIH News in Health*

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<http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/aug2011/capsule1>

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Know Your Family's Health History

You have mom's hair and dad's height. That's great, but genes can also pass down chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. Learn your family health history to help gauge your risk for disease. Then do all you can to head it off.

If you know your grandfather died of a heart attack, for example, you might want to quit smoking. If your aunt had breast cancer and you're a woman, you might want to get a mammogram. Environment, culture and lifestyle also play roles in your risk for disease. You can't change your genes, but you can modify your lifestyle to reduce your risks. If you know that you might have a genetic risk for a chronic disease, modifying your lifestyle might be even more important for you. To find out what your family risks are, ask people on both sides of your family. Start with your parents, siblings and children. Next come grandparents, aunts and uncles, and nieces and nephews.

What to ask each family member

- Common chronic diseases. These include heart disease, diabetes, neurological diseases, hemophilia, cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anemia, stroke, and cancer. Get as much specific information about these diseases as you can.
- Other serious medical conditions, such as, pregnancy complications or birth defects.
- Age at onset of disease.
- Ethnicity. Some conditions are more common in certain ethnic groups.
- Also ask about family members no longer living: What was the age at death and cause?

What it means

These are instances when you may face a greater health risk because of a family history of illness:

- The disease occurred at an earlier age (in some cases).
- The disease occurred in more than one close relative on the same side of the family.
- The disease occurred in combination with another disease, for instance, your mother had both breast and colon cancer.
- The disease occurred in a gender not normally prone to it, such as breast cancer in males.

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FAQ Regarding Family Health History

On the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website there is a comprehensive Question and Answer section on family health history. Information is there such as:

- What is Family History?
- Why is Knowing My Family History Important?
- How can knowing my family history help lower my risk of disease?
- How do I learn about my family history if I'm adopted?

To learn answers to common questions about Family Health History visit the website address at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/genomics/famhistory/resources/faq.htm>

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/educational/hearttruth/>

Healthy Recipe: Veggie Stir-Fry with Toasted Almonds

Ingredients:

- 1 tsp. olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ tsp. fresh ginger, minced
- 3 scallions, minced
- 2 carrots, peeled and sliced into strips
- ½ large red pepper, sliced into strips
- 1 celery stalk, sliced diagonally
- 1 cup fresh snow peas
- ½ cup canned sliced water chestnuts, drained
- ½ cup fat-free, reduced sodium chicken or vegetable broth,
- 1½ Tbsp. lite soy sauce
- 2 tsp. honey
- 2 tsp. cornstarch
- 2 Tbsp. almonds, sliced, toasted

Instructions:

In large nonstick skillet or wok, heat oil over medium-high heat. Stir-fry garlic, ginger and scallions for about 1 minute. Add pepper and carrots and stir-fry 2 minutes. Add celery and stir-fry 2 minutes. Add snow peas and water chestnuts. Stir in ¼ cup broth. Cover and steam 2-3 minutes. Snow peas should be bright green and crisp. Meanwhile, in measuring cup, combine remaining broth, soy sauce, honey and cornstarch. Add sauce to vegetables and cook for a couple of minutes, until sauce thickens.

Yield: 6 servings

Each serving provides:

Calories: 68, Fat: 2 g, Protein: 2 g, Sodium: 223 mg, Carbohydrate: 11 g, Fiber: 2 g

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