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MCHD HEALTH BLOG

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Public Health
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MORGAN COUNTY HEALTH DEPT.



KNOW YOUR FAMILY HEALTH HISTORY

November is Family Health History Month. Family gatherings are a great time to catch up on family news and information. This makes holiday celebrations such as Thanksgiving, a good time to learn more about your family's health history. Knowing and acting on your family health history is an important way to protect your health.

Diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease are often inherited, meaning that they run in families. Tracing illnesses suffered by your parents, grandparents and other blood relatives can help your healthcare provider predict your risk for specific diseases and make vital screening and treatment decisions before any disease is evident. Family members also frequently share environments, lifestyles and personal habits. These things can also be factors for disease. By having all this information your health care provider can develop a more complete picture of your health and your risk factors for disease. Together you can work on ways to reduce that risk.

Here are some tips from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on how to collect your family health history:

- Talk to your family. Write down the names of your close relatives from both sides of the family: parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. Talk to these family members about what conditions they have or had, and at what age the conditions were first diagnosed. You might think you know about all of the conditions in your parents or siblings, but you might find out more information if you ask.
- Ask questions. To find out about your risk for chronic diseases, ask your relatives about which of these diseases they have had and when they were diagnosed. Questions can include:
 - Do you have any chronic diseases, such as heart disease or diabetes, or health conditions, such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol?
 - Have you had any other serious diseases, such as cancer or stroke? What type of cancer?
 - How old were you when each of these diseases or health conditions was diagnosed? (If your relative doesn't remember the exact age, knowing the approximate age is still useful.)
 - What is your family's ancestry? From what countries or regions did your ancestors come to the US?
 - What were the causes and ages of death for relatives who have died?
- Record the information and update it whenever you learn new family health history information. My Family Health Portrait, a free web-based tool, is helpful in organizing the information in your family health history. My Family Health Portrait allows you to share this information easily with your doctor and other family members. It can be found online at: <https://cbit.github.io/FHH/html/index.html>
- Share family health history information with your doctor and other family members. If you are concerned about diseases that are common in your family, talk with your doctor at your next visit. Even if you don't know all of your family health history information, share what you do know. Family health history information, even if incomplete, can help your doctor decide which screening tests you need and when those tests should start.