



What You Should Know About Your Family's Medical History

It's common for traits such as eye or hair color, build, or individual features to be passed down through families. But our physical features aren't the only things we can inherit and pass along to our children. Many illnesses or medical conditions, from depression to cancer, also run in families. Knowing your family's medical history can help you prepare for and perhaps even avoid health problems.

Knowledge of your family's medical history can help you or your health care provider with the following:

- Determine your risk for specific conditions.
- Determine whether you would benefit from preventive measures against certain health conditions.
- Create a plan for lifestyle changes that can improve your overall health.
- Calculate your risk of passing conditions on to your children and identify other family members at risk.
- Diagnose an illness or a medical condition.
- Help you choose genetic or other medical tests.
- Identify other family members who may be at risk.

A variety of illnesses and conditions have a genetic component and can be passed along bloodlines. These include:

- Heart disease, such as coronary artery disease, an irregular heartbeat, mitral valve prolapse, or sudden death from a heart condition
- Certain cancers, especially breast, ovarian, and prostate cancers
- Stroke
- Diabetes, particularly adult-onset diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Mental illness, such as depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia
- Alzheimer's disease
- Allergies, both environmental and medication
- Glaucoma, blindness, and other eye conditions, such as macular degeneration
- Kidney disease, including polycystic kidneys
- Obesity
- Infertility or miscarriages
- Chromosomal disorders or birth defects, such as cleft lip and palate
- Learning disabilities and developmental delays
- Blood disorders, such as hemophilia, thalassemia, and sickle cell anemia
- Metabolic disorders, such as phenylketonuria (PKU), homocystinuria, tyrosinemia
- Thyroid disorders
- Bone and joint disorders, such as osteoporosis or arthritis
- Gastrointestinal (GI) disorders, such as inflammatory bowel disease
- Epilepsy
- Female reproductive disorders, such as polycystic ovary disease, endometriosis, fibroids, and irregular menses
- Alcoholism
- Sudden, unexplained death, especially at a young age