

# HEALTH & YOUR FAMILY TREE



A family health history can help you and your doctors create a unique road map to wellness and disease prevention. Use these tips to explore the branches of your family tree.

## START CLOSE, THEN BRANCH OUT.

Look at yourself, your kids and your parents first — and then your grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

## FIND THE FAMILY HISTORIAN.

Ask an aunt, grandparent or cousin who kept in touch with relatives to share memories.

## BE RESPECTFUL.

Recognize that some family members will want to speak in private and that others won't want to discuss it at all.

## BREAK THE ICE.

Start by asking, "What was it like when you were growing up?" Let the conversation unfold.

## ASK FOR DETAILS.

If your relative is willing, ask whether cancer, heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, mental disorders, substance abuse or other health problems have affected any family members. Write down their:

- Relationship to you
- Gender
- Age, if living
- Cause and age at death, if deceased
- When symptoms began or disease was diagnosed
- Any medications regularly taken
- Any surgeries or hospitalizations
- Smoking, exercise & dietary habits

## GET ORGANIZED.

Jot information down on our attached handy form, and save in folders or a binder. Consider sharing copies with relatives.

## DON'T BE DISCOURAGED.

If you can't collect all of this information, don't worry. Any information you can gather is worthwhile!

## REFRESH YOUR FAMILY HISTORY REGULARLY.

Family health histories always change, so update yours annually or every few years.



**IF YOU'RE ADOPTED:** If you feel comfortable doing so, ask your adoptive parents for information about your biological parents or request information from the adoption agency. Then start tracking your health conditions so that if you have children, you can pass it on.

For more helpful resources, visit the Center for Personalized Genetic Healthcare at [clevelandclinic.org/services/genomics-genetics](https://clevelandclinic.org/services/genomics-genetics)



Circle One

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**M** **F**  
Mother's Side Father's Side  
Circle One


How related: \_\_\_\_\_

Living **L** or Deceased **D** → Age at death: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cause of death: \_\_\_\_\_  
Current age: \_\_\_\_\_

 Medications: \_\_\_\_\_

 Surgeries: \_\_\_\_\_

 Hospitalizations: \_\_\_\_\_

 Health Conditions: \_\_\_\_\_ Age at onset / diagnosis \_\_\_\_\_

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Circle One

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**M** **F**  
Mother's Side Father's Side  
Circle One


How related: \_\_\_\_\_

Living **L** or Deceased **D** → Age at death: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cause of death: \_\_\_\_\_  
Current age: \_\_\_\_\_

 Medications: \_\_\_\_\_

 Surgeries: \_\_\_\_\_

 Hospitalizations: \_\_\_\_\_

 Health Conditions: \_\_\_\_\_ Age at onset / diagnosis \_\_\_\_\_

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## Branching out: Getting the most out of your next medical visit

### 1. Be punctual.

Arrive on time—or even a few minutes early. Doing so will give you plenty of time to check in and have your vitals (height, weight, blood pressure) taken before your appointment time. It also will help you get as much time with your doctor as possible.

### 2. Bring your medications with you.

Medication reconciliation is a very important part of every visit. Your doctor needs to know exactly what medications you are taking, what doses, and how many times a day you are taking them. Please be sure to include herbal and over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and supplements.

### 3. Bring important information.

This includes any records of tests, lab work, or office visit notes from other doctors you are seeing. This also includes your self-recorded logs of blood pressure readings or blood sugar checks, as well as your family health history.

### 4. Be honest.

Let's be honest — many medical conditions are uncomfortable to discuss. But you should not be embarrassed to talk about anything with your doctor. Actually, leaving out details or lying to your doctor can be bad for your health because it affects your care, so tell your doctor everything. Honesty is definitely the best policy — especially for your health.

### 5. Bring a list of any new concerns or questions you might have.

Some questions that you should consider asking at your preventive care (annual physical) visits:

- a) Where do I stand in my overall health? What goals should I be aiming towards?
- b) What tests do I need to stay healthy?
- c) Does my family history bring up any concerns?
- d) Am I on the right medications, or are there medications that I can stop taking?

**Your questions:** \_\_\_\_\_

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