

# Family Health History Campaign Guide

Cancer Prevention and Wellness  
2023



**Ascension**

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## Overview – What is Family Health History and why is it important?

Thanksgiving in the United States of America is not only a time to celebrate the harvest and blessings of the previous year. Since 2004, the U.S. Surgeon General has declared it to be National Family Health History Day<sup>1</sup> (MacDougall). Family Health History is a collection of the different diseases and health conditions in your family. Collecting your family health history will factor in your genes, environment, and behaviors like exercises and diet<sup>2</sup> (National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Office of Genomics and Precision Public Health). All of these can ultimately affect your health. DNA is in each and every cell of your body, and it is the hereditary material that makes us like our relatives. Genes are specific sequences of DNA that contain information to carry out different jobs in the body. Particular changes, or variants, in a gene can make it more likely for you to get certain diseases or health problems.

According to Precision Medicine at the American Medical Association<sup>4</sup>, collecting your family history can help healthcare providers provide better patient specific care to you and your loved ones. Some ways that collecting your family history can improve care is:

- Determine whether or not you are at high risk for certain diseases or cancers
- Recommend targeted screenings, testing and follow-up care based on your individual risk
- Provided early warning signs of disease
- Help your provider create a personalized wellness plan
- Refer you to a specialist

To help individuals collect and organize their family health history, the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) and the Office of the Surgeon General have put together a tool called My Family Health Portrait. My Family Health Portrait is an online tool that can be printed and then shared with both other family members and your primary care provider<sup>1</sup>. You can use this online tool or choose to use our printable guide to collect this information. The Cancer Prevention and Wellness Program has created the following information to help guide you in collecting and organizing your family health history – that you can then input into My Family Health Portrait or our printable guide. It will also explain what you should do with this information once collected.

## Starting – How to begin the conversation

### Use what you have or know

Do you or an immediate family member have an existing family tree or lists of family members? Look through any photo albums you may have or family heirlooms that may have names written on them. Start writing down family names and any history that you may know.

### Talk to your family members

You can use family gatherings as a perfect opportunity to talk to your family members about health history. Collect information from your close relatives from both sides of your family: parents, siblings, grandparents, aunt, uncles, nieces and nephews. If you are adopted, you may be able to find out about some of your family history through your adoptive parents or even asking the adoption agency for records. It is important to respect other family members' privacy if they wish to not tell you about their medical history.

The table<sup>1</sup> below will help you understand what questions are important to ask while helping you organize your family history to be able to fill out My Family Health Portrait.

### Collection Tool: An outline of what to collect from your family members<sup>1</sup>

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Descriptive information</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Family member name</li> <li>● Sex assigned at birth</li> <li>● Was this person born a twin? (If so, identical or not identical)</li> <li>● Family member relationship to you ( i.e mother, father)</li> <li>● Was this family member adopted?</li> <li>● Race               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Ethnicity               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hispanic or Latino, Ashkenazi Jewish, Not Hispanic or Latino</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <b>Background information</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Are they still alive?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If so, what is their age?</li> <li>○ If not, how and what age did they die from?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |
| <b>Health Information</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● List any disease/condition/cancer, what age they were diagnosed and if they had cancer what type of treatment (see <i>list below for examples of diseases/conditions/cancers</i>).</li> </ul>   |

## List of disease, conditions, and cancers

- **Cancer**  
bone, brain, breast, colorectal esophageal, kidney, leukemia/lymphoma, liver, lung, muscle, ovarian/fallopian tube, pancreatic, prostate, skin, stomach, thyroid, uterine, or unknown type
- **Clotting Disorder**  
clotting disorder, deep vein thrombosis, pulmonary embolism, Factor V Leiden
- **Dementia/Alzheimer's**
- **Diabetes**  
pre-diabetes, type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes, gestational
- **Gastrointestinal disorder**  
colon polyps, crohn's, irritable bowel syndrome, ulcerative colitis
- **Heart Disease**  
Coronary artery disease, heart attack, heart disease, cardiomyopathy(enlarged heart), arrhythmias (heart rhythm disorders)
- **High Cholesterol**  
hypercholesterolemia
- **Hypertension or High blood pressure**
- **Kidney Disease**  
Cystic kidney disease, diabetic kidney disease, kidney structure differences present at birth, kidney nephrosis, nephritis
- **Lung Disease**  
Asthma, COPD, chronic lower respiratory disease, emphysema, pneumonia, lung disease
- **Osteoporosis**
- **Psychological Disorder**  
Anxiety, Attention Deficit Disorder, autism spectrum disorder, bipolar disorder, depression, eating disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, panic disorder, personality disorder, schizophrenia, unknown
- **Stroke/TIA or Mini stroke**
- **Sudden Death**  
sudden infant death syndrome, accident, suicide, murder, from an unknown cause or car accident

## Organize

Now that you have collected all the relevant information needed, enter this information into the [My Family Health Portrait](#). You are able to save data to a file on your computer to either complete later or update as new information becomes available. You are also able to view and print either a pedigree/diagram or family health table.

## **Completion – What to do with the information you have collected**

Your family health history can help you and your provider understand what diseases and cancers you are at a higher risk for developing. It is important for you to understand that just because you have a family history of a certain disease, does not necessarily mean you will get it. For some diseases and cancers, you can change or modify certain things in your everyday life to decrease your risk. Some examples are quitting smoking, taking preventive medication, decreasing your alcohol intake, completing preventive screenings, or exercising.

After completing your family health history, it is important to inform your primary care doctor or care team. Request that they place the information in your electronic health record. The family health table you have created on My Family Health Portrait is a great tool to share.

If you have risk factors for specifically developing cancer, talk to your doctor to determine if the Ascension Wisconsin Cancer Prevention and Wellness Program is right for you. Your care team at Ascension Wisconsin Cancer Prevention and Wellness Program provides a personalized risk assessment and wellness plan that may include:

- Enhanced screening and testing to find cancer at its earliest stages
- Preventive medications if appropriate
- Risk-reducing surgery or interventions if appropriate
- Genetic counseling and testing
- Health coaching and goal setting
- Specialty referrals (registered dietitian and/or weight management)
- Plan for follow-up care and communication with your primary care provider
- Potential clinical trials that are available
- Smoking/tobacco cessation plans, including medications and behavior modification
- Alcohol and drug addiction counseling referrals

Our care team will share your wellness plan with your primary care doctor. At Ascension Cancer Care, we're here to help connect you to specialists and support your health and wellness goals. To learn more or to schedule an appointment, call [262-785-2273](tel:262-785-2273).

## References - Where we got this information

1. MacDougall, R. (2014, November 24). *This Thanksgiving, celebrate National Family Health History Day*. National Human Genome Research Institute.  
<https://www.genome.gov/27559631/this-thanksgiving-celebrate-national-family-health-history-day>
2. National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Office of Genomics and Precision Public Health. (2023, May). Family Health History. Centers For Disease Control and Prevention.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/genomics/famhistory/index.htm>
3. National Cancer Institute. (n.d.). NCI Dictionary of Genetics Terms.  
<https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/genetics-dictionary/def/gene>
4. Precision Medicine. (n.d.). *Collecting a Family History*. American Medical Association.  
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