

Family History is Important for Your Health

Although we know that family history is important to our health, only about a third of Americans have ever tried to put together their own family health history. Despite the fact that we cannot change our genetic makeup, knowing our family history can help us to reduce our risk of developing critical health problems such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes or cancer.



By tracing the illnesses that other blood relatives have had, our doctors can determine which diseases we may be at risk for developing and, in turn, help us take action to keep us and our families healthy. Based on family history information, physicians may recommend lifestyle changes such as quitting smoking, becoming more active and eating healthier to reduce our risks for many diseases such as those mentioned above. They might also recommend certain screening tests as a result of hereditary risks. For example, screening tests such as mammograms and colorectal cancer screening can detect some forms of cancers at an early stage when they are most treatable. Other screening tests detect disease risk factors, such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure, which can be treated to reduce the chances of developing disease.

To help us focus attention on the importance of family health history, the U.S. Surgeon General, in cooperation with other agencies within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has launched a national public health campaign, called the U.S. Surgeon General's Family History Initiative, to encourage all American families to learn more about their family history.

The Surgeon General has declared Thanksgiving to be the annual National Family History Day. On this day when families are together, the Surgeon General encourages them to talk about, and to write down, the health problems that seem to run in their family. In support of the Surgeon General's Family History Day, the Healthy Ohioans Initiative is encouraging all Ohioans to explore their family's health history together this Thanksgiving season. To assist with this effort, there are several links listed following this announcement, where families can go to find various family history tools to record their family's health history and resources here in Ohio to contact for further information on the subject.

More Information on Family History and Genetic Counseling Resources in Ohio

Family History Tools:

- U.S. Surgeon General's Family History Initiative
<http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/>
- CDC's Family History Web site for the Public
<http://www.cdc.gov/genomics/public/famhist.htm>
- National Society for Genetic Counselors
<http://www.nsgc.org/consumer/familytree/>

Family History and Tools (continued)

- The James Clinical Cancer Genetics Program
<http://www.cancergenetics.med.ohio-state.edu/2800.cfm> - for information on **JAMESlink**[®] - a free-standing computer system designed to provide individualized information about cancer risk based on family history.
- March of Dimes
<http://www.marchofdimes.com>



Information and a Listing of Ohio's Regional Comprehensive Genetic Centers:

- The Regional Comprehensive Genetics Program of Ohio
<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/ODHhprograms/GENSERV/genserv1.htm>