



Your Family Health History & Genetics

It is important for parents to learn as much as they can about their family health history in order to have a complete record for your child throughout his or her life.



Family Health History Plays a Major Role In:

- Identifying familial and hereditary disorders
- Determining inheritance patterns and recurrence risks for known and suspected genetic disorders
- Identifying those at risk for a genetic disorder
- Identifying those not at risk for a genetic disorder
- Providing information necessary for appropriate genetic counseling
- Providing an important adjunct to patient management of all childhood diseases, such as growth problems (</English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/When-a-Child-is-Unusually-Short-or-Tall.aspx>) and asthma (</English/health-issues/conditions/allergies-asthma/Pages/Asthma.aspx>)

Ideally a family history is recorded at your child first visit to the pediatrician, as well as a mother's first prenatal visit. A family history should also be updated yearly with each well-child visit (</English/family-life/health-management/Pages/Well-Child-Care-A-Check-Up-for-Success.aspx>).

Questions Your Pediatrician May Ask About Family History:

- Are there any health problems that are known to run in your family, or that close relatives have been told are genetic? If so, what are these conditions?
- Is there anyone in the family who had cancer, heart disease, or other adult-onset health problem at an early age, such as between 20 and 50?
- Does/did anyone in the family have intellectual disability (</English/health-issues/conditions/developmental-disabilities/Pages/Intellectual-Disability.aspx>), learning problems (</English/health-issues/conditions/learning-disabilities/Pages/What-are-Learning-Disabilities.aspx>), or have to go to a special school?
- Have there been any early deaths in the family, including stillbirths, infant deaths, multiple miscarriages, or shortened life span?
- What is your ethnic background? Some genetic conditions are more common in certain geographic, ethnic, and racial groups.
- Have any relatives had extreme or unexpected reactions to medications or therapy?

Barriers to Collecting a Family History

According to a survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, although 96.3% of Americans considered knowledge of family history important to their personal health, only about 30% have ever tried to actively gather and organize their families' health histories.

Barriers for families to collecting a family history include:

- Lack of time
- Incomplete records
- Inaccessible family members
- Adoption (</English/family-life/family-dynamics/adoption-and-foster-care/Pages/Questions-About-Biological-Parents.aspx>)
- Incorrect or vague diagnoses
- Denial or guilt
- Family members not talking to each other
- Same
- Multiple family members who care for a child

- Fear of discrimination and stigmatization

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Additional Resources

- [Your Child's Health Story \(/English/family-life/health-management/Pages/Your-Childs-Health-Story.aspx\)](#)
- [Prenatal Genetic Counseling \(/English/ages-stages/prenatal/Pages/Prenatal-Genetic-Counseling.aspx\)](#)
- [Detecting Genetic Abnormalities \(/English/ages-stages/prenatal/Pages/Detecting-Genetic-Abnormalities.aspx\)](#)
- [Reduce the Risk of Birth Defects \(/English/ages-stages/prenatal/Pages/Reduce-the-Risk-of-Birth-Defects.aspx\)](#)
- [Congenital Abnormalities \(/English/health-issues/conditions/developmental-disabilities/Pages/Congenital-Abnormalities.aspx\)](#)
- [My Family Health Portrait Tool \(https://familyhistory.hhs.gov/fhh-web/home.action\)](https://familyhistory.hhs.gov/fhh-web/home.action) (US Department of Health and Human Services through the Surgeons General's Family Health History Initiative)

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The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.