



WELLNESS WORKSHEET 8

Create a Family Health Portrait

The Surgeon General’s Family History Initiative encourages all American families to learn more about their family history. Knowing your family health history is a powerful guide to understanding risk for disease. However, keep in mind that a family history of a particular illness may increase risk, but it almost never guarantees that other family members will develop the illness.

To get the most accurate health history information, it is important to talk directly with your relatives. Explain to them that their health information can help improve prevention and screening of diseases for all family members.

Start by asking your relatives about any health conditions they have had—including history of chronic illnesses, such as heart disease; pregnancy complications, such as miscarriage; and any developmental disabilities. Get as much specific information as possible. It is most useful if you can list the formal name of any medical condition that has affected you or your relatives. You can get help finding information about health conditions that have affected you and your family members—living or deceased—by asking relatives or health care professionals for information or by getting copies of medical records. If you are planning to have children, you and your partner should each create a family health portrait and show it to your health care professional.

The family tree form on the reverse of this page will help you collect and organize your family information. (This chart is also available in a downloadable interactive format from the Department of Health and Human Services [<http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory>].) No form can reflect every version of the American family, so use this chart as a starting point and adapt it to your family’s needs. First, write each of your relatives’ names in the designated boxes and circle whether they are male (M) or female (F). On the next line, write the name of any health conditions they have had. If you know the age at which they were diagnosed with a condition, write that in parentheses after the condition. For example: “diabetes (diagnosed—age 37).” If family members have died, write “deceased” and the age at which they died. For example: “heart attack (deceased—age 63).”

For twins, write “twin” on the first line for both individuals. If the twins are identical, write “identical twin” on the first line for both. If your family includes half brothers or half sisters, write “half brother” or “half sister” on the first line and note “different father” or “different mother” on the next line.

Some conditions are more common in people with a shared background or ancestry. It is important to record the ancestry of your relatives and be as specific as possible. For example, if you know that your grandmother is Hispanic and her family comes from Mexico, write “Mexican” underneath her name. Likewise, if your family is from Africa, Asia, Europe, or South America, note the country they came from, if possible.

Once you complete “My Family Health Portrait,” take it to your health care professional so that he or she can better individualize your health care. Be sure to make a copy for your records and update it as circumstances change or you learn more about your family’s health history.

Copy and Add to Chart as Needed to Adapt Chart to Your Family

CUT OUT AND ADD TO CHART AS NEEDED

<table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 40px;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">M</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">F</td></tr> </table> _____ _____ _____ _____	M	F	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 40px;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">M</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">F</td></tr> </table> _____ _____ _____ _____	M	F	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 40px;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">M</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">F</td></tr> </table> _____ _____ _____ _____	M	F
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My Family Health Portrait

Name: _____
Date: _____

