

## What's in your family tree?

Knowing your family's medical history is one of the best gifts you can give yourself or your children. Fact is, it can save lives! How? A family medical tree can alert you to watch for early signs of disease, get more frequent screening tests, or change health habits for the better. And it is easy to assemble your family's medical tree.

### Whom to include?

To get started on your family medical history, list your closest relatives (siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles), their date of birth, and their major diseases. For deceased relatives, write the date and cause of their death.

### What else to list?

Besides cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, note next to each name any other major disorders they have such as high blood pressure, stroke, kidney disease, anemia, miscarriages, arthritis, epilepsy, osteoporosis, allergies, ulcers, mental illness, cataracts, and glaucoma. Even better: If you can, include the age when any disease first started and include any health-related habits such as excessive consumption of alcohol or smoking.

### Where to find the information?

Check first with family members, promising to keep all information confidential, if they wish. If possible, learn about deceased relatives from several family members to corroborate the information. Ask whether anyone has copies of death certificates; state health departments can also provide copies.

**Action:** Once you've assembled the information you need, bring it to your doctor for interpretation.

**Benefit:** You'll be better equipped to plan ways to head off or prepare for any genetic risk you uncover...and possibly add years to your own branch of the family tree.

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