

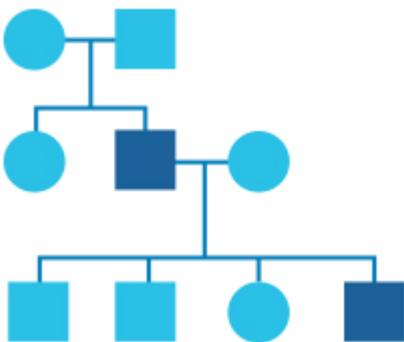


To the point: *When it comes to genetics, it's not all about you. Your entire family's health history is important. To allow for the best risk assessment by your healthcare provider, you can do your part by talking to your family and writing down health and medical information about your siblings, parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents, and anyone else in your extended family who may have a medical condition that you are curious or concerned about.*

Your Family History

Family health history is a very important part of assessing a person's risk for many health conditions. If you were to go in and see a prenatal genetic provider, such as a genetic counselor or a geneticist, they would want to discuss your family history in detail. They would ask about your health, the father of the baby's health, the health of brothers and sisters on both sides of the family, nieces and nephews, parents, grandparents, and depending on the situation they may go even further back in your family tree.

Family health history information is documented in a diagram called a *pedigree*:



Healthcare providers use symbols (circles represent females, squares represent males) to organize your family history in a manner that allows them to best understand what is going on in your family.

What are important things to know about my family's health history?

The following is a list of items that genetics providers would likely ask you about. If possible, it would be good for all of us to contact our relatives and write down information about any family members who have or have had any of the following health issues:



- Genetic condition
- Chromosome abnormality
- Intellectual disability
- Born with a birth defect
- Blindness or deafness
- Infant death/stillbirth
- Unexplained childhood illnesses or deaths
- Multiple miscarriages
- Infertility
- Cancer (type and age at diagnosis)
- Early onset heart disease or heart attack (before age 55 for a male relative and 65 for a female relative)
- Other health conditions that “run” in the family
- If pregnant or considering pregnancy, are you and your partner related?
- Ethnic backgrounds (where did your ancestors come from...England? Africa? Spain? Mexico?)
- If you are pregnant, have you had any medication, drug, alcohol, x-ray exposures during the pregnancy?

If you do see a genetic counselor or geneticist and provide them with the above information, they can let you know if there is anything concerning in your family history and offer appropriate information and testing options.

Family Health History Resources

The following are a couple of resources to help you get your family history documented. Now is the time to get started! You can start by calling family, asking some questions at your next holiday family gathering or family reunion (whenever you feel comfortable). If you have a brother, sister, or another family member to discuss this with first, it might be easier if you tag-team and approach other family members together. Let them know that this is something that will be beneficial to everyone in the family in the long run!

[March of Dimes Family Health History Form](#)

[My Family Health Portrait; A tool from the Surgeon General](#)

What if I don't know anything about my family health



history?

Due to various circumstances, sometimes individuals know little to nothing about part or all of their family health history. We can still get quite a bit just by knowing about your health, but this may limit a genetic provider's ability to give you a full risk assessment. There may be ways to track down health information if you were adopted, for example, as the adoption agency may have your birth parents' health information on file.

I've got my family history written down, now what?

- Keep a copy in a safe place
- Share it with your doctor
- If you are concerned about anything you've learned in your family health history from a genetic perspective you can always reach out to a genetics provider, such as a [genetic counselor](#) or geneticist