

By collecting health information from your relatives and drawing a family health tree, you can help identify any disease patterns that may be present in your family. This information can then be given to your GP, who can assess your risk for disease and work with you to help reduce this risk.

What should I be looking for?

Many diseases can seem to “run in the family” but are not inherited, often they happen by chance. However, if you notice any of the following you should talk to your general practitioner or health professional:

- Several closely related individuals with the same or related conditions. Some examples of related conditions include:
 - breast and ovarian cancer;
 - bowel/colon and endometrial (uterine) cancer;
 - diabetes, heart disease and high-blood pressure.
- A common disease that develops at an early age (see Table 2):

Table 2: Early age of development for common conditions

| Condition | It is considered 'early', if the condition develops before: |
|--------------------|---|
| Breast cancer | 50 years of age |
| Ovarian cancer | 50 years of age |
| Prostate cancer | 60 years of age |
| Bowel/colon cancer | 55 years of age |
| Heart disease | 60 years of age |

- Sudden death in someone who appeared healthy.
- More than three miscarriages or stillbirths to a couple or a woman.
- Medical conditions in children of parents who are closely related (i.e. second cousins or closer).
- Anything else that causes you concern.

It is a good idea to speak with your relatives about the information that you find, so that they know about diseases in the family. They can see their doctor and get advice on how to reduce their risk of disease.

Even if your family does not have a history of any health conditions, you should still eat a well-balanced diet, be physically active and reduce environmental risks (e.g. smoking) to ensure good health.

Remember, many common conditions can also be caused by environmental factors. It is not always possible to be sure if your family has an inherited condition, especially if your family is small and not much information is available.

If there is anything that causes you concern, you should consult:

Your general practitioner

or

Genetic Services of Western Australia,
King Edward Memorial Hospital,
Bagot Road, Subiaco WA 6008

Telephone: (08) 9340 1525

Email: gswa@health.wa.gov.au

For further information on creating your family tree go to <http://www.genomics.health.wa.gov.au/education>



Your Family Health Tree

Families share many things, including genes, environment and lifestyle, that can all contribute to getting a disease. In most cases, having a family history is not enough to cause a disease, but it can combine with lifestyle (e.g. diet, inactivity, smoking) or environmental factors (e.g. sun exposure) to increase your risk of certain diseases. For some diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers, knowing if they tend to “run in the family” can be a sign that you are more at risk and should be more careful about protecting your health to reduce your risk of these diseases.

You can't change your genes, but if you are aware of your family's health history, you can reduce your risk of getting some conditions by choosing a healthy lifestyle and having regular screening tests e.g. screening mammography for breast cancer detection.

How do I create a family health tree?

1. Use the family health tree on the next page to write in information about yourself including:
 - Name, sex, year of birth (or current age)
 - Year of death (for any relatives who have died)
 - Lifestyle or environmental factors (such as smoking, environmental hazards, workplace exposures)
 - Any major medical conditions
 - Age of disease onset
 - Ethnic/cultural background
 - Any close relatives who have had children together
2. Ask your family (blood relatives) for the same information about themselves and write this into the family health tree too. Also ask them about relatives who have died. It could be important to know their age at death and if they have been diagnosed with any health conditions (see Table 1).

Remember that discussing family health matters can be difficult and requires sensitivity, respect and understanding. Some of your relatives may not want to talk about their health and you may need to ask another family member for information.

Table 1: Common health conditions that can be inherited

| | |
|--|---|
| Heart disease | Cancers (e.g. breast, ovarian, prostate, bowel/colon, melanoma) |
| Diabetes | High blood pressure or high cholesterol |
| Stroke | Mental illness |
| More than 3 miscarriages or stillbirths to a couple or woman | Genetic conditions (e.g. cystic fibrosis, haemochromatosis) |
| Osteoporosis | Asthma |
| Birth defects (such as cleft lip, spina bifida) | |

Name: _____
 Sex: _____
 Year born/died (or current age): _____
 Ethnicity: _____
 Major medical conditions
 (Incl. Age of onset): _____

 Lifestyle issues: _____

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 Lifestyle issues: _____



| Lifestyle Issues |
|------------------------|
| Smoking |
| Obesity |
| Poor Diet |
| Lack of Exercise |
| Chemical Exposure |
| Excessive Sun Exposure |
| Alcohol |

| Major Medical Conditions | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Heart disease | Cancers |
| Diabetes | High blood pressure |
| High cholesterol | Stroke |
| Mental illness | Asthma |
| Osteoporosis | Genetic conditions |
| Miscarriages/stillbirths | Birth defects |