

# Family Health History & Your Health



## Care for Your Elders, Care for Yourself, Care for Your Children

**Family health history is a link between you and your family members**

Many of your physical traits are inherited from your parents. You may share the same nose as your dad, or you may look exactly like your mother. But did you know that your risks for certain health problems such as heart disease and diabetes are also inherited?

**Family health history is information about diseases that run in your family**

Knowing about the diseases that run in your family can help you prevent getting them. You can make healthy choices to lower your risk for getting diseases that are in your family. Also, sharing this information with your doctor will make it easier for your doctor to give you the right care that you need.



**Collecting and sharing your family health history can help you and your family stay healthy**

# How Do I Collect Health Information About My Family?

## Helpful Tips

- **Talk to your parents, grandparents and other relatives about their medical histories.** Some people may not want to share information, or may not remember their medical histories. Don't push - it is more important to respect their feelings. Any type of information you get will be helpful.
- **Check if your family already has a family tree,** charts, or listings of family members.
- **For each relative, try to find out their age or date of birth, and medical problems such as:**
  - ⇒ Chronic illnesses, e.g., cancer, heart disease, diabetes
  - ⇒ Pregnancy & childbirth problems, e.g., miscarriage, birth defects, genetic disorders
  - ⇒ Developmental disabilities, e.g., learning problems
- **For family members who have passed away, find out their age at death and cause of death.**
- **Write the information down so that you will remember it.** One easy way to record it is by making a **family health history tree**. See the back for more information. Try to update your family health history every few years.
- **Share the information with your doctor and your family.** If you have concerns about your family health history, you may want to see a **genetic counselor**.

### **What is a genetic counselor?**

A genetic counselor is a certified health professional who provides information and support to people about birth defects and genetic disorders. Your doctor may help refer you to one.

## Questions to Ask

Not sure how to get started? Here's a list of sample questions that will help you to talk with your family members:

### **Childhood**

- Where were you born?
- Where did you grow up?
- Did you have any health problems as a child?
- Do you have brothers or sisters?
- Did any of them pass away during childhood?

### **Adulthood**

- What jobs have you had?
- What was your work environment like?
- Do you have children? What are their names and when were they born?
- What habits have you had that could have affected your health?
- Did you develop any health conditions as an adult? At what age? Did any of these conditions need treatment or surgery?

### **Parents and Grandparents**

- When and where were your parents born?
- What do you remember about your grandparents? Where and when were they born?
- Do you recall any health conditions that affected your parents and/or grandparents?
- Do you recall if they took any over-the-counter or prescription medicines? Did they use traditional Chinese medicine or herbal medicine?

### **Family**

- What foods do your family usually eat?
- Do you know of any family members that had problems in pregnancy or childbirth?
- Are there any illnesses that you think might run in your family?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your life or about health concerns in your family?

Courtesy of the Genetic Alliance, "A Guide to Family Health History"



## Notes

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## What is a Family Health History Tree?

One easy way to record your family’s health information is to make a family health history tree. It is similar to a family tree except it has health information about your family members.

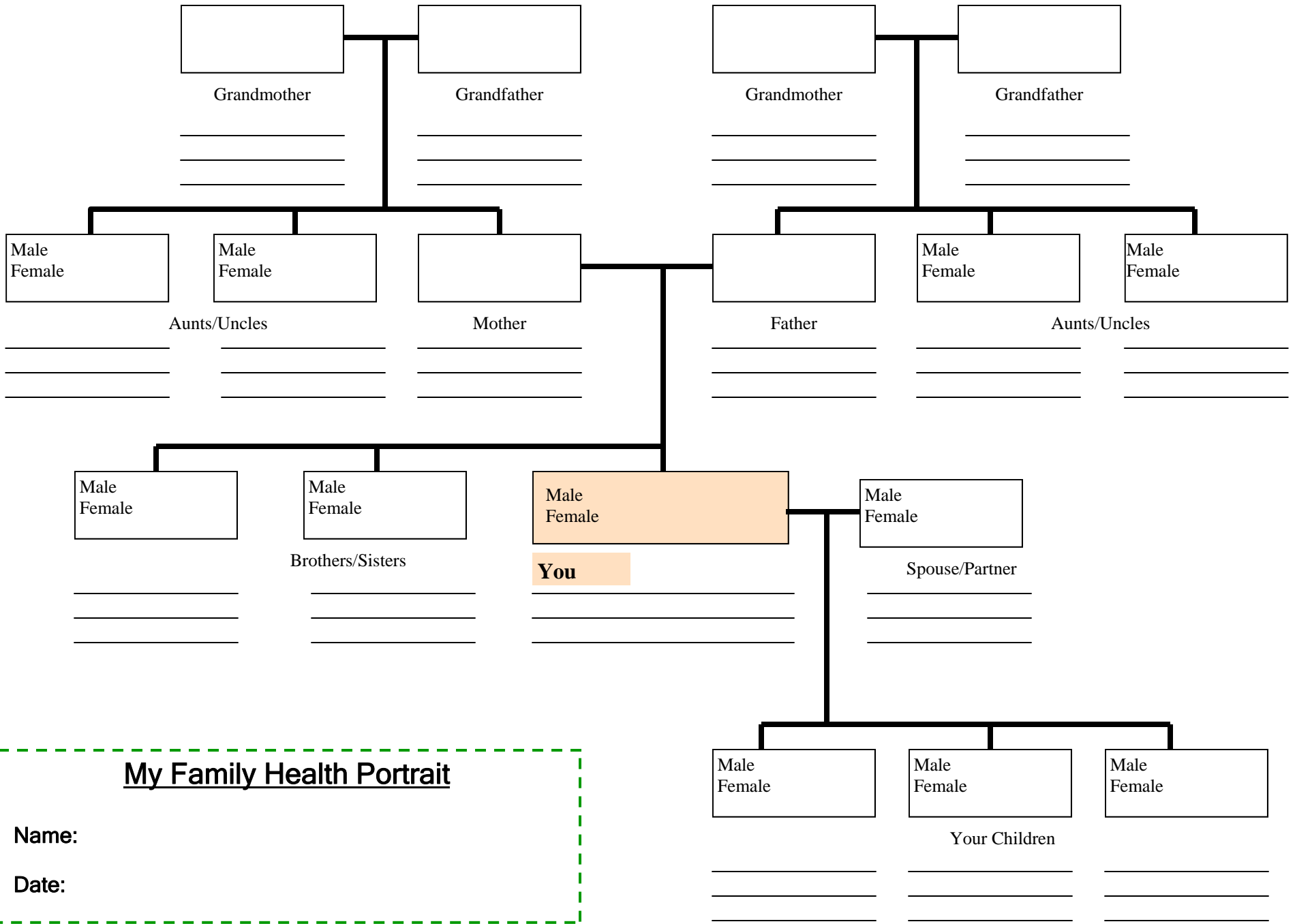
To help people make their own family health history trees, the U.S. Surgeon General has created a My Family Health Portrait form. It is simple and easy to use.

### Create a family health history tree for you and your family

Fill out the My Family Health Portrait form on the next page and follow the instructions below:

1. Write each of your relatives’ names in the boxes and circle if they are male or female.
2. On the next line, write the name of any health conditions they have had, e.g., diabetes.
3. If you know the age at which they were diagnosed with a condition, write that information too, e.g., diabetes diagnosed at age 42.
4. If family members have died, write “passed away” and the age at which they died, e.g., passed away at age 75.
5. If you know the country that your family members are originally from, write that information too, e.g., China.
6. Once you complete the form, make a copy for your records, and share it with your doctor.

Each family is different so this form may not reflect your family. Use this chart as a starting point and change it to fit your family’s needs.



**My Family Health Portrait**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

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If you have any questions regarding the information contained in this brochure, please call our health educators at (212) 966-0228 ext. 132

如果你對本小冊子的內容有任何問題，請和我們的健康教育員聯系。

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