

# Creating your family health tree

December 7 2017, by Julie Davis, Healthday Reporter

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(HealthDay)—A family health history can be key to your wellness.

Think of it as a [family tree](#) all about your [health](#)—a record of your close

relatives' medical conditions, [lifestyle habits](#) and even where they grew up.

A [family health](#) history helps you see any increased risk of developing serious health problems, like heart disease, cancer and specific illnesses that are passed from one generation to the next.

Although you can't change your genes, you can take steps to lower health threats with good lifestyle habits and regular medical screenings.

To get started, talk to your parents and siblings. Then move on to second-degree relatives, like grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews, and half-siblings. If your grandparents are no longer alive, ask your parents or any living aunts, uncles or cousins about them.

Here are some questions to ask each relative to create a [family](#) health tree:

- What, if any, chronic conditions do you have?
- Have you had any other serious illnesses, such as cancer?
- How old were you when you developed each illness?
- Have you had pregnancy or childbirth issues?
- What countries did our relatives come from?
- Has anyone in the family had birth defects, learning problems or developmental disabilities?
- What illnesses did our late grandparents have?
- How old were they when they died?
- What did they die of?

Options for creating your own document include printed and online versions. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' "My Family Health Portrait" is available both ways.

To create a printed family health tree, access a form at:

[www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/portrait/portraiteng.pdf](http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/portrait/portraiteng.pdf)

To create an online family health tree, go to:

[familyhistory.hhs.gov/FHH/html/index.html](http://familyhistory.hhs.gov/FHH/html/index.html)

Once you fill in the information, go over it with your health-care provider so he or she can help you stay healthier. Also, share it with other family members, especially children and grandchildren, to help them live healthier—and longer—lives, too.

**More information:** Learn about the U.S. Surgeon General's Family Health History Initiative at the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services website and how to use the [family health portrait tool](#) to create your family health record.

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