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ADULT HEALTH BULLETIN

MAY 2011

Reprinted by:
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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: FAMILY HEALTH HISTORY

How important is your family health history?

A family has many of the same characteristics, due to their similar genes, behaviors, lifestyle, and environment. These can often influence health — both now and in the future. If there are members of your family with a chronic disease, you may have a high risk of developing that disease yourself.

A family health history is a graphic record of the diseases and health conditions seen in your family. Some people may know a lot of information about their families, while others know nothing or very little. Discovering your family's health history and sharing it with your healthcare provider can be a useful tool.

It is suggested that a family health history go back three generations.

- Talk to other family members about their health and the health of the relatives they know.



- Write down the information you learn.
- Update any information you already know.

How can knowing your family health history help you?

- Although you cannot change your genes, you can change your behavior. If you know

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Take the time to research your family's health history.

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your family has a history of heart disease, you can take steps to prevent or delay the disease. Some suggested behaviors might include not smoking, getting plenty of exercise, and eating a balanced diet.

- If you know the diseases that run in your family, you have a head start on prevention and can have the most impact.
- You can participate in health screenings at an appropriate time determined by your family health history. If you know your family has a history of breast cancer, you and your healthcare provider can determine an appropriate time to start screening for it.

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If you do not have a family history of a certain disease, does that mean you are not at risk?

- No, although you may have a smaller chance of developing a certain disease, there are other factors that may affect your health such as environment and lifestyle.
- Some family members may have died young, before developing a certain disease. If you are going back three generations, some of the relatives may have died before they had a chance to develop certain diseases. The disease will still be carried through your genes.
- Environmental factors can also determine



Other factors can affect your health such as environment and lifestyle.

if a disease will develop. Living in a polluted environment or eating healthy foods can help or hinder development of disease. Just because no one in your family has had lung cancer or heart disease does not mean you will never get those diseases. You cannot smoke everyday or eat fast food everyday and not see some affect on your health.

Take the time to research your family's health history. Once you have done the work, share it with other family members and share it with your healthcare provider. It can be a very useful tool.

REFERENCES:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. March 2010. Family Health History. <http://cdc.gov>

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