



Date: April 25, 2008

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## Know Your Family Medical History

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)—A family medical history is a record of health information about a person and their close relatives.

A complete record includes information from three generations of relatives that includes children, brothers and sisters, parents, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, grandparents, and cousins.

Your family medical history may be one of the strongest influences on your risk of developing heart disease, stroke, diabetes or cancer.

The easiest way to get information about your family medical history is to talk to your relatives about their health. Ask about their medical problems, age of disease onset, age of death and ethnic background. A family gathering could be a good time to discuss these issues. Additionally, obtaining medical records and other documents, such as obituaries and death certificates, can help complete a family medical history.

“I encourage my patients to also ask their family members what concerns they have about the family’s medical history and what aspects of that history are worthy of celebration,” said Pat Jonas, M.D., a family physician in Spring Valley, Ohio.

It is important to keep this information up-to-date and share it with your family physician because if your family physician notices a pattern of disease, it may be a sign of an inherited form of disease that is passed on from generation to generation.

“With a person’s medical history, I can help them to understand the implications of the information in their family’s medical history and develop a plan to respond to concerns,” said Jonas.

Your family physician may suggest lifestyle changes such as quitting smoking, getting more exercise and better eating habits to reduce your risk for diseases that run in your family.

“A family physician may also recommend genetic counseling to consider specific genetic tests to clarify disease potential. One of the most well known of these tests is the BRCA1 for breast cancer. Genetic testing to clarify side effects of pharmaceuticals in individuals will be another use of genetic testing in the near future,” said Jonas.

Screening tests such as mammograms and colorectal cancer screening may also be recommended to detect any cancers at an early stage when they are most treatable. Screening tests can also detect disease risk factors like high cholesterol and high blood pressure, which can be treated to reduce the chance of getting disease.

*The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,400 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.*



## FACT SHEET

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**A complete medical history includes information from three generations of relatives:**

- Children
- Brothers and sisters
- Parents
- Aunts and uncles
- Nieces and nephews
- Grandparents
- Cousins

**What to ask:**

- Medical problems
- Age of disease onset
- Age of death
- Ethnic background

**Other resources to obtain:**

- Medical records
- Obituaries
- Death certificates

**What your family physician may do:**

- Suggest lifestyle changes such as quitting smoking, getting more exercise and having better eating habits
- Recommend screening tests such as mammograms and colorectal cancer screening and also conduct screenings for high cholesterol and high blood pressure

*Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Institutes of Health*