

Are you interested in exploring genetic testing?

KNOWING YOUR FAMILY MEDICAL HISTORY IS IMPORTANT



It is said that “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” and, when it comes to your genes, that’s especially true. You inherit many things from your parents, including your height, eye color, and hair color. But did you know that you can also inherit an increased risk of developing certain diseases such as cancer and heart disease?

Your family medical history provides powerful insights into your risk of developing certain diseases. Talking with your relatives about the diseases that are present in your family is very important, but some people are unsure about which family members to talk with, and what information to ask. As you prepare to speak with your physician about genetic testing, these are some tips that may help you gather your family medical history:

1 BE SPECIFIC

Ask your family members about the specific medical conditions that they and other relatives have had diagnosed. For example, if a family history of cancer is reported, ask about the exact type of cancer, who had it, and the age at which it was diagnosed. If there is a family history of heart disease, ask for specific details about how your relatives were diagnosed and what symptoms they had. If a family member has had a genetic test for cancer or heart disease, are they willing to share the results with you?

2 DIG DEEPER

Branch out to your more distant relatives, including cousins, aunts, and uncles. Be sure to talk with your grandparents if they are living. They are likely to know a great deal about the family medical history going back several generations. Also, make sure to ask about both your mother and father’s sides of the family.

3 BE RESOURCEFUL

Harness the power of social media (such as Facebook and Twitter) to connect with your relatives and ask questions about your family medical history. Take advantage of family gatherings such as reunions or weddings to talk with your relatives and learn more.

4 KNOW YOUR ROOTS

Certain diseases are more common in specific ethnic groups. Ask about your family’s roots. In particular, ask from which country your relatives originated. If you are adopted, you may be able to learn some information about your family medical history or ethnicity through your adoptive parents.

5 BE RESPECTFUL

Some individuals may not wish to talk about their personal health information. It is important to respect their wishes and not push too hard for information.

6 AND FINALLY, RECORD IT

Document the information you learn and share it with other members of the family, including your own children and siblings.