



# A GUIDE TO KNOWING YOUR FAMILY HEALTH HISTORY

Discussing your family health history will empower you to take better care of your own health. You and your family members share genes, behaviors, cultures, and environments, each of which may affect your risk of developing health problems. Knowing the illnesses experienced by direct members of your family will help your doctor better predict the health risks you may face and will help you take preventative action to stay healthy.

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## **STARTING THE CONVERSATION<sup>1</sup>**

- Find a good time to talk. Consider a time when your family is together in a relaxed setting. If it's not possible to talk to your relatives in person, you can ask them your questions via phone, mail or e-mail.
- Begin by explaining why it's important for all your relatives to understand the family health history and know the risks they face. This knowledge can help save the lives of future generations.
- These conversations can be sensitive and some family members may not want to share all of their health information. Be respectful and let them know that whatever information they can provide will be helpful.

## **REFERENCES**

1. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: The Surgeon General's Family Health History Initiative. Available at: <http://www.hhs.gov/programs/prevention-and-wellness/family-health-history/index.html> Date accessed: 24th May 2016.

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: CDC Features - Gather and share your family health history. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/features/familyhealthhistory/> Date accessed: 18th May 2016.

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS<sup>2</sup>**

- Do you have, or does anyone in the family have any chronic diseases, such as heart disease or diabetes? What about health conditions such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol? If so, at what age was it diagnosed?
- Have you had any other serious diseases, such as cancer or a stroke? If so, at what age was it diagnosed?
- For family members that have passed away, inquire from other family members about the age that they passed, what caused their death and if they had any diseases.
- If you need more details, ask follow-up questions.
- The more information you have, the better. Once everyone is comfortable consider additional questions like: What medications are you currently taking? Have you or your partner had any difficulties with pregnancies or fertility? Do you have any history of mental health issues?

Make sure you write this information down and update it when you can. If there is anything that concerns you, share it with your doctor. This information will be vital to provide on medical forms in the future.