

Your Family Health Tree

To get a clear look at your family's health history, make a family health tree — a genogram.

A genogram shows the names of family members, how they are related, their dates of birth, their health problems, and the dates and causes of their deaths. Making a genogram allows you to see patterns in your family's health history. It's a tool you and your doctor can use to judge your risks for some of the more than 3,000 ailments believed to run in families — including heart disease, cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's

disease, thyroid disease, certain birth defects, alcoholism, depression, and schizophrenia. Illnesses that have occurred in family members before the age of 55 may particularly interest you and your doctor — because you may want to take extra steps to avoid them. If you know your risks, you can often decrease them by changing your health habits or by spotting an ailment early so it can be treated.

- 1** To make your own genogram, start with yourself and work back through time. Use circles for women, squares for men.
- 2** Write in your name, date of birth, and any serious health problems or operations you've had.
- 3** To the side of your own information, add the names of your sisters and brothers. Include notes about their health.
- 4** Add your parents and any aunts or uncles on the 2 branches above you.
- 5** Above them, your 4 grandparents, each with date of birth and list of any known ailments.
- 6** For people who have died, include the date of death and the cause of death, if you know it. For example: Jane Smith: b. 4-1-1890, d. 6-14-1960. Tuberculosis, angina, high blood pressure. Died of stroke.

You may need to call some of your relatives or check family records to find out all you need to know. Then, update the genogram every year or so, and keep it with your other health records. The attached chart can help you get started. First, print a copy for yourself.

If you have children, print another for the other parent; then combine that chart with yours to make a single two-parent chart for your children. If your family is large, you will need to extend the chart. Go to the next page to see the printable chart.

Your Family Health Tree

GRANDPARENTS ON FATHER'S SIDE

Name: Name:

AUNTS, UNCLES, PARENTS

Name: Name: Father's Name:

GRANDPARENTS ON MOTHER'S SIDE

Name: Name:

AUNTS, UNCLES, PARENTS

Mother's Name: Name: Name:

SIBLINGS

Your Name: Name: Name:

Male Female Married

Name of Person Constructing Genogram

Date

Address

copyright © 1996 Health Magazine

SAMPLE

GRANDPARENTS ON FATHER'S SIDE

Name: John Smith
 b. 4-1-1890 d.7-8-1942
 Asthma, hypertension
 heart disease.
 Died of heart attack.

Name: Jane Doe:
 b. 7-21-1892 d. 8-9-1950
 Two miscarriages,
 heavy smoker,
 cataracts.
 Died of lung cancer.

AUNTS, UNCLES, PARENTS:

Name: Name: Father's Name: Bill Smith:
 b. 6-20-1922