

COLLECTING YOUR FAMILY'S MEDICAL HISTORY COULD SAVE YOUR CHILD'S LIFE

You might not realize that your father's diabetes or your cousin's sickle cell disease could affect your child, but this family history information could help save your child's life.

According to a *Pediatrics* supplement, "Use of Family History Information in Pediatric Primary Care and Public Health," that's not the only family history information that can affect your child's health or be important to their health care. Along with genes, your family often has similar behaviors, such as exercise habits, and a common culture, such as the foods you eat. You may live in the same area and come into contact with similar environmental factors. Family history includes these factors, which can all affect health.



In addition, a family history can help your child's doctor make a diagnosis if your child shows signs of a disorder. It can reveal whether your child has an increased risk for a disease and, if so, can help your doctor suggest screening tests. Many genetic disorders first become obvious in childhood, and knowing about a history of a genetic condition can help find and treat the condition early.

You might not think that chronic diseases such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes affect children, but children with a strong family history of these diseases can show signs in childhood.

Having a family history of a disease does not mean that your child will get that disease. However, some children with a family history of chronic diseases can benefit from starting good lifestyle habits, such as exercising and eating healthy, right away.

Ways to Collect Your Child's Family History

- Record the names of your child's close relatives from both sides of the family. Include conditions each relative has or had and at what age the conditions were first diagnosed.
- Use the U.S. Surgeon General's online tool for collecting family histories, called "My Family Health Portrait." It is available at <https://familyhistory.hhs.gov>.
- Discuss family history concerns with your child's doctor. Gather family history information before seeing the doctor, using "My Family Health Portrait." Fill out family history forms carefully.
- Update your family history regularly and share new information with your child's doctor. Remember that relatives can be newly diagnosed with conditions between doctor's visits. This information can help the doctor to determine which tests and screenings are recommended to help you know your child's health risk.

The best way to learn about your family history is to ask questions. Talk at family gatherings and record your family's health information—it could make a difference in your child's life. More information is available at: www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/bd/family_history.htm and www.cdc.gov/genomics/public/famhist.htm.

Did You Know?

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