

# U.S. Surgeon General's Family History Initiative



<http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory>

Tracing the illnesses of your parents, grandparents, and other blood relatives can help you and your doctor predict the disorders for which you may be at increased risk and take action to keep you and your family healthy.

Health care professionals have known for a long time that both common diseases – like heart disease, cancer, and diabetes - and rarer diseases - like hemophilia, cystic fibrosis, and sickle cell anemia - can run in families. For instance, if people in one generation of a family have high blood pressure, it is not unusual for people in the next generation to have high blood pressure.

To focus attention on the importance of family health history, U.S. Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., in cooperation with agencies of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), including the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), has launched a national public health campaign, called the U.S. Surgeon General's Family History Initiative, to encourage all families to learn more about their family health history.

## National Family History Day

Surgeon General Carmona has declared Thanksgiving to be National Family History Day. Thus, Thanksgiving, a day that many families gather together, and the traditional start of the holiday season for many Americans, is the annual focus for this Initiative. However, the Surgeon General encourages families, whenever they gather, to talk and share information about the health problems that run in their family. Learning about your family's health history may help ensure a longer future together.

## My Family Health Portrait

Americans know that family history is important to health. A recent survey found that 96 percent of Americans believe that knowing family health history is important. Yet, the same survey found that less than one-third of Americans have ever tried to gather their family's health history.

Because family health history is such a powerful screening tool, the Surgeon General has created a computerized tool to help make it fun and easy for people to create a sophisticated portrait of their family's health. The tool, called "**My Family Health Portrait**", will help organize and display a person's family tree by creating and printing a record of their family's health history. This record can be used to share with other family members and health care providers to help identify common diseases that may run in families.

"My Family Health Portrait" is available for free in either English or Spanish from the website [www.hhs.gov/familyhistory](http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory). For a free print version, call the HRSA Information Center at 1-888-Ask HRSA (275-4772) and ask for "My Family Health Portrait" in English (inventory # HRS00360) or Spanish (inventory # HRS00361).