

The Santiago Family

A family's history of diabetes



How can family history help this family?

Tina Santiago, who is 36 years old, recently found out that her 38 year old brother was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. After her brother's diagnosis, she was surprised to learn that her uncle had been diagnosed with diabetes in his 40's and her grandmother had been diagnosed in her 50's. Tina did not know much about her family's health history because her family members did not talk about their health problems.

Tina asked her mother about other family members (blood relatives) with health problems. She found out that her father had high cholesterol and was taking medication. Her mother also thought Tina's aunt was taking medication for high cholesterol.

Tina told her doctor about her family history of diabetes and high cholesterol. The doctor informed Tina that she is at increased risk of developing diabetes and high cholesterol due to her family history. He educated her about certain behaviors and regular tests to help prevent diabetes and high cholesterol and improve her overall health:

Lifestyle/Behavior *

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day
- Limit intake of saturated fats, particularly fats from animal products
- Be moderately active for at least 30 minutes on 5 or more days a week, or vigorously active for at least 20 minutes on 3 or more days a week
- Do not smoke
- Limit to one alcoholic drink per day

* For more information about lifestyle changes, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at <http://www.cdc.gov>

Health Screening Tests

- Cholesterol test every 5 years
- Blood glucose (sugar) test regularly (typically recommended every 3 years—doctors may recommend more frequent screenings for individuals at increased risk for diabetes)
- Blood pressure check every year

The doctor said that knowing about her family health history is important. He explained that collecting family health history can identify health problems that run in a family. The information might motivate Tina and her family to adopt healthier behaviors which can help prevent health problems. Based on her family health history, the doctor might also suggest regular tests that detect health problems early, when they are most treatable.

The doctor encouraged Tina to record and regularly update her family health history and to share it with her family. The doctor said it was important to find out and record:

- Major medical conditions and causes of death of family members.
- The age the family member was diagnosed with disease.
- How the family members with disease are related to each other.

Tina wrote down what she knew about her family health history in a journal. She also recorded the family health history of her husband, Juan. She would update the information as she learned more and she agreed to pass it on to her children when they were older.

Below is the information that Tina recorded:

Santiago Family History

Tina Santiago's Family

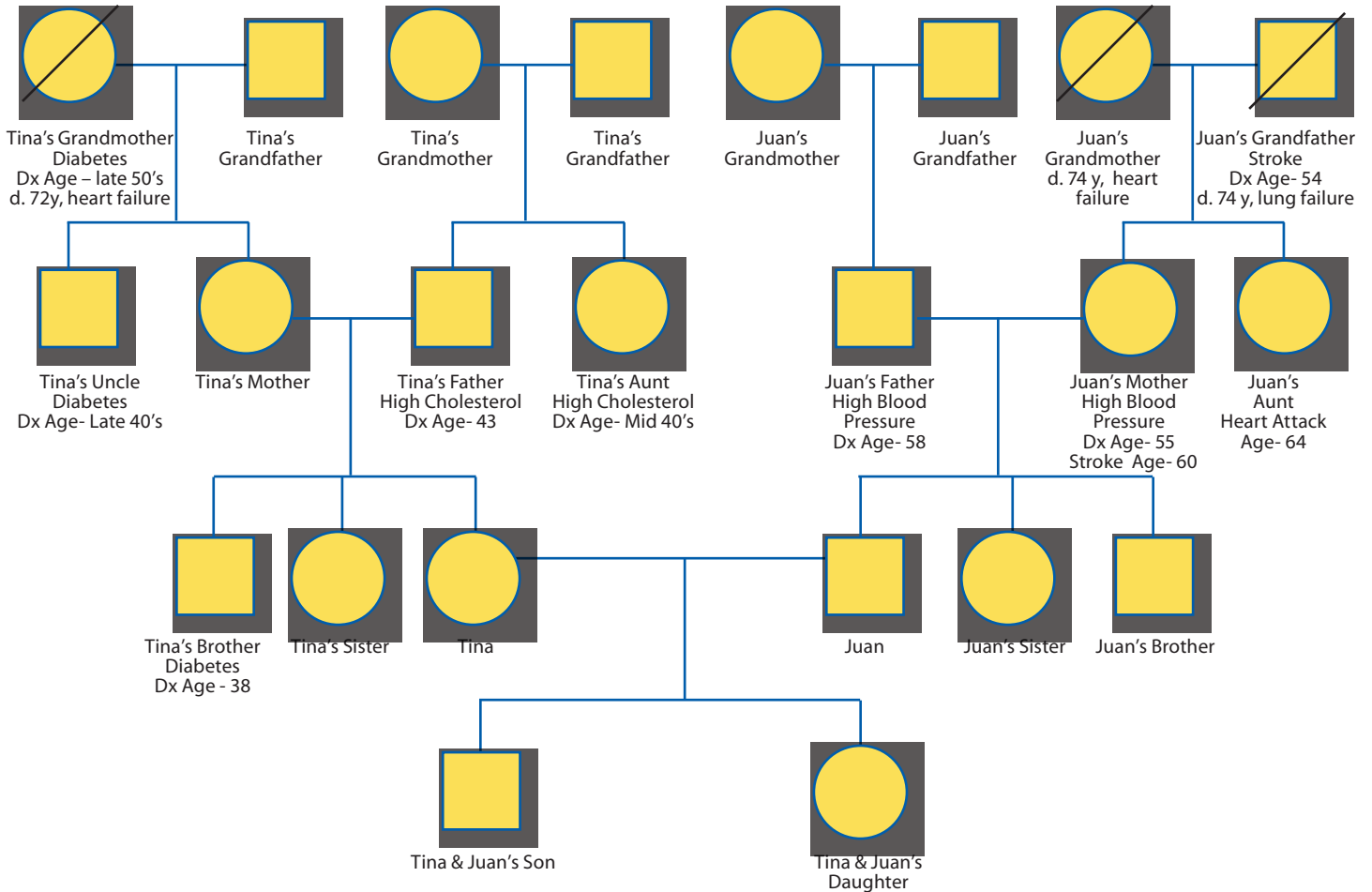
- Tina's brother was diagnosed with diabetes when he was 38 years old.
- Tina's uncle (on her mother's side) was diagnosed with diabetes in his late 40's.
- Tina's grandmother (on her mother's side) was diagnosed with diabetes in her late 50's.
- Tina's grandmother (on her mother's side) died of heart failure at age 72.
- Tina's father was diagnosed with high cholesterol when he was 43 years old.
- Tina's aunt (on her father's side) had high cholesterol by her mid 40's.
- Tina's sister had no health problems to report.
- Tina's mother had no health problems to report.
- Tina's grandfather (on her mother's side) had no health problems to report.
- Tina had no information about the health of her grandparents on her father's side.
- Tina and Juan's son and daughter had no health problems to report.

Juan Santiago's Family

- Juan's mother was diagnosed with high blood pressure when she was 55 years old and had a stroke when she was 60 years old.
- Juan's father was diagnosed with high blood pressure when he was 58.
- Juan's aunt (on his mother's side) had a heart attack when she was 64 years old.
- Juan's grandfather (on his mother's side) had a stroke when he was 54 years old and died at age 74 of lung failure.
- Juan's grandmother (on his mother's side) died of heart failure at age 74.
- Juan's sister had no health problems to report.
- Juan's brother had no health problems to report.
- Juan had no information about the health of his grandparents on his father's side.

The information that Tina collected can also be recorded as a type of drawing called a pedigree or family tree. There are tools that can help draw family health histories, including one from the U.S. Surgeon General, which can be accessed for free at <http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory>. A paper copy can also be ordered by calling 1-888-Ask HRSA (275-4772) and asking for “My Family Health Portrait” in English (inventory # HRS00360) or Spanish (inventory # HRS00361).

Below is a pedigree with the family history information that Tina collected.



Date of last update: February 1, 2005

Recorded by: Tina Santiago

Symbol Meanings

- male
- female
- person that has died
- Dx Age** Age when the disease was first diagnosed
- d.** Age at death, cause of death

