What is a family health history?
A family health history is a portrait of the shared lives and health of your extended family.

Screening recommendations

... for individuals WITH A FAMILY HISTORY of cardiovascular disease

- People with a family history of early coronary heart disease (before 55 for men and before 65 for women) should talk to their health care provider about screening and prevention.

- Talk to your health care provider about your family health history to make a personalized plan to maintain your health.

... for individuals WITH NO KNOWN FAMILY HISTORY of cardiovascular disease

- Cholesterol screening should begin at age 20.

- Blood pressure screening should begin at age 18.

- Risk factor assessment should begin at age 20. Risk factors to be recorded at least every two years include: smoking, diet, alcohol intake, physical activity, blood pressure, body mass index, waist circumference and pulse. A cholesterol profile and fasting blood glucose measurement should be made according to the patient’s risk for high cholesterol and diabetes.
Cardiovascular disease risk factors and what you can do about them

Things you can change

• **Obesity**: Greater weight leads to greater risk
• **Diet**: A diet high in fat and calories and low in whole grains, vegetables, and fruits increases risk
• **Exercise**: An inactive lifestyle increases risk
• **Stress**: Increases risk
• **Smoking**: A smoker’s risk of developing coronary heart disease is 2-4 times that of non-smokers
• **Alcohol**: Drinking too much alcohol can raise blood pressure, cause heart failure, and lead to stroke
• **Glucose intolerance or diabetes**: Increases risk
• **Hypertension**: Increases risk
• **High cholesterol**: Increases risk

Things you can’t change

• **Family history**: Children or siblings of individuals with cardiovascular disease are more likely to develop it themselves
• **Race/Ethnicity**: African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, American Indians, Native Hawaiians, and some Asian Americans have greater risk than Whites
• **Age**: Over 83 percent of people who die of coronary heart disease are 65 or older
• **Sex**: Men have a greater risk of heart attack and earlier heart attacks than women

What can you do if you have a family history of cardiovascular disease?

• Lose weight if you are overweight
• Eat a balanced diet including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat or fat-free dairy products, and lean meats
• Be active
• Quit smoking
• Drink less alcohol
• Manage your stress levels
• Talk to your health care provider about your family health history of cardiovascular disease
• See your health care provider for regular screening and risk assessment
• Make a plan to preserve your health
• Take your medications to control high cholesterol, hypertension and diabetes

Sources

• National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, www.nhlbi.nih.gov
• American Heart Association, www.americanheart.org

If you require this document in another format, such as large print, Braille or cassette tape, call 651-201-3609.