

# Health Tips

from New London Hospital

## Family Medical History: Knowledge Is Power

Many of us are committed to maintaining good health through a proper diet, exercise, and eliminating bad habits, like smoking. Weight, exercise, and smoking are all factors that we can change or influence.

However, the list of risk factors for many diseases includes one factor we cannot control: family medical history. For example, if your father or mother had heart disease, you are at higher risk for developing it than someone whose parents had healthy hearts. But this doesn't mean that you can't at least diminish your risks.



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### Know Your Risks

Very few diseases are simply inherited like blue eyes or curly hair. Most conditions that run in families are caused by a combination of genes and lifestyle factors—such as diet, smoking, and exercise habits. In addition to heart disease, such conditions include: several cancers, cataracts and glaucoma, asthma and allergies, diabetes, arthritis, osteoporosis and migraine headaches.

Knowing whether a family member had any of these conditions is important. But the more complete the information, the more useful. It's helpful to know the answers to these questions: How many family members were affected? How closely were they related? At what age did they become ill? At what age did they die?

The further back you can trace your family medical history, the better. If members of the previous generation are still alive, ask them what they remember.

### Action Plan for Prevention

Once you know your inherited risks, you can help overcome them by making healthy lifestyle choices, asking your doctor for a screening schedule, and being consistent with taking prescription medications.

By taking these steps, you can turn your family medical history into a powerful preventive tool.

*Marie Prinsen, MD, Family Medicine, is accepting new patients. She can be reached at 526-5544.*

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