

# Your Family History & Heart Disease



In 2005, about 4% of Oregonians reported that they had heart disease, and about half of Americans have a family member with heart disease.\* If you have a parent, brother/sister, or child with heart disease, your chance of developing heart disease yourself is at least 2 times greater than someone with no family history.\*

The more people in your family who have had heart disease, the higher your chance of getting heart disease. Also if those family members had heart disease at a young age that puts you at an even greater risk.

If you know of a family member who has had heart disease, then you may want to write down your family health history.

## *What is a Family Health History?*

Like heart disease, many health problems run in families. Families share their habits, environments, and lifestyles, as well as their genes.

A “Family Health History” is a record of you and your close family’s health. By taking your family health history and sharing it with your doctor, you can learn what health problems you may be at higher risk for and how to prevent or reduce your chances of having heart disease.

## *What can you do if you think you have a family history of heart disease?*

- » Use the Surgeon General’s family history tools: My Family Health Portrait can be found at <http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/>
- » The next time you go to your doctor, take your family history with you and share it with your doctor.
- » Take action to reduce other things that put you at risk for having heart disease.



*Besides family history, here are some things that may put you at risk for heart disease:*

- Being overweight
- Having an inactive lifestyle
- Smoking
- Over the age of 65 years old
- Being African American, Hispanic, American Indian/Asian Pacific Islander, or Asian American
- Having diabetes
- Having high blood pressure
- Having high cholesterol



*What you can do to reduce your chance of getting heart 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.
- Get active. Moderate activity 30 minutes at least 5 days of the week has big benefits.
- Quit smoking.
- Take your medications to control high cholesterol, hypertension and diabetes.
- Talk to your health care provider about your family history and how to be screened for heart disease.
  - National guidelines recommend cholesterol screening for some people who have a family history of heart disease.\*\*
  - Your doctor can review your family health history and see what screening is right for you.

*Where can I learn more?*

Oregon Genetics Program  
[www.oregongenetics.org](http://www.oregongenetics.org)

American Heart & Stroke Association  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

Oregon Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program  
<http://oregon.gov/DHS/ph/hdsp/index.shtml>

CDC Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov/dhdsp](http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp)

CDC National Office of Public Health Genomics  
[www.cdc.gov/genomics](http://www.cdc.gov/genomics)

US Surgeon General Family History Website  
[www.hhs.gov/familyhistory](http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory)

“This is not just knowledge for knowledge’s sake. Knowing your family health history can save your life, as well as the lives of those you love.” 2006 Acting Surgeon General Kenneth P. Moritsugu, M.D., M.P.H.

**Oregon  
Genetics  
Program**

[www.oregongenetics.org](http://www.oregongenetics.org)

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\* McCusker ME, Yoon PW, Gwinn M, Malarcher AM, Neff L, Khoury MJ. Family history of heart disease and cardiovascular disease risk-reducing behaviors. Genet Med 2004;6(3):153-8.

\*\* U.S. Preventive Services Task Force: Screening for Lipid Disorders in Adults