

Family Health History Can Provide Key Information About Health Risk Holidays Are an Ideal Time to Talk with Family Members About Their Health History

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PHILADELPHIA, Nov. 26 /PRNewswire/ -- Individuals who want to learn more about their health risks need look no further than their own families. A family health history can provide key information about a family's health, including risks for certain inherited conditions and health problems such as heart disease, diabetes and some cancers.

Creating a family tree is an easy way to start documenting family history. This tree, also known as a pedigree, shows links between family members and focuses on the medical and health information for each relative.

"Creating a medical family tree begins with communication," explained Dawn Allain, President of the National Society of Genetic Counselors. "This holiday season, spend time talking with your family about their health history. Write down the medical information for several generations of your family including your grandparents, your parents, your siblings, your children and yourself. Once you create a family tree, keep it in a safe place, and keep it updated. It's a great way to stay in touch with extended family."

"Your family's medical history is key to recognizing health concerns you might be at risk for," said Dr. Joann Boughman, Executive Vice President of the American Society for Human Genetics. "Documenting your family's health can reveal patterns in your genetic makeup and provide insight for prevention of future health problems."

"Genetic or hereditary diseases are caused by changes or mutations in genes, which are then passed from one generation to the next," explained Sharon Terry, President of the Genetic Alliance, an organization that works to empower advocacy groups to provide resources and services to families living with genetic conditions.

Medical family trees are becoming a standard medical tool. They can help a doctor or genetic counselor identify health factors early on. Knowing health risks empowers patients by helping them identify options for health management such as early detection or preventive measures.

To learn more about creating a medical family tree, visit these web sites: National Society of Genetic Counselors (<http://www.nsgc.org/>), American Society for Human Genetics (<http://www.ashg.org/>), or Genetic Alliance (<http://www.geneticalliance.org/>).

Web site: <http://www.geneticalliance.org/>

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