



Charting Your Family Health

Some health conditions have a tendency to run in families, including prostate and breast cancer. It is important to track the history of your family's health in order to determine your own health risk. By tracking the health of your parents, siblings, and other relatives with a family medical tree, you and your health care provider have a useful tool to help track disease patterns such as prostate cancer and breast cancer.

Prostate Cancer:

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed among men. Men at high risk include those with a family history as well as African-American men. High risk men may wish to begin yearly screening at age 40 or earlier. If detected early, prostate cancer can be highly treatable.

Remember, early stage prostate cancer might not have any noticeable symptoms. With this in mind, you should see your health care provider if you have any of the following symptoms: persistent hip or back pain, difficulty urinating, painful or burning urination, or blood in your urine.

Breast Cancer in Women:

Women in the United States get breast cancer more than any other type of cancer except for skin cancer. A family history of breast cancer particularly in a mother or sister is one of the risk factors. Between 5-10% of women diagnosed have a history of breast cancer in their family. Early stages of breast cancer generally have little to no symptoms, but women should see their health care providers about any pain or irregularities in their breasts that do not go away. Women should start early detection plans as early as age 20 with monthly self-examinations as well as clinical examinations every three years. By the age of 40 a yearly mammogram is an important routine to get into.

Breast Cancer in Men:

Breast cancer is not a women's disease alone. Approximately 2,000 men are diagnosed with breast cancer each year. Men are evaluated in the same way as women with breast cancer including mammograms. Between 5-10% of men who have been diagnosed with breast cancer have a history of it in their family, a mother or sister. The symptoms are the same as breast cancer in women. The risk of being diagnosed with male breast cancer increases with age, but it's important for all men to be aware of detecting the signs of breast cancer.

Creating Your Family Medical Tree:

Here are some helpful hints to get started in creating your own family medical tree:

- Interview all your relatives, including your immediate family, parents, siblings, and siblings' children.
- Work back as many generations as possible.
- Don't forget to include birth dates and cause of death.
- Record general health habits such as smoking.