



Genes to Generation: Know your family's health history

What is my family health history?

Your family health history is a record of health-related information about you and your close biological family members. This includes your parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

Why should I learn my family's health history?

Understanding your family's health history can help you live a healthier life. It is a good way to see if there are any diseases that are passed down (or inherited) from parents to children – or “run in your family.”

Diseases that can be common in families are **heart disease** and **diabetes**, which is the leading cause of kidney disease.

Health history in Black and Hispanic/Latino families

In underserved communities, in particular Black and Hispanic/Latino communities, there can be challenges to learning and sharing family health history. This could be because:

- People are unsure about their family roots
- Lack of communication from the health care system about the importance of family health history

Why does this matter?

In the U.S., more than 1 in 3 people with kidney failure are Black. And Hispanic people are 1.5 times more likely to have kidney failure compared to non-Hispanic people.

If you discover from your family history that you have a higher chance of developing kidney disease, you and your doctor can take steps to keep your kidneys healthy!

How might knowing my family history improve my health?



Knowing your family health history can help you and your doctor:

Understand your chance of developing kidney disease

You may have a higher chance of developing kidney disease if you have a family history of:

- Kidney disease
- Diabetes
- Heart disease

Learn when to start screening for kidney disease

If you have family members with kidney disease, you may also show signs of kidney disease earlier than normal. Ask your family members how old they were when they were diagnosed. This can help you know when you should start screening for kidney disease (testing to look for signs).

For example, if you have several family members that developed kidney disease before age 50, your doctor may recommend early screening.

Get genetic testing for kidney disease

Genetic testing looks for changes in your genes, which are pieces of DNA you inherit from your parents. DNA is instructions in your cells that tell your body how to work.

If you have a family history of kidney disease, your doctor may recommend genetic testing to look for specific gene changes that can lead to kidney disease.

If you know you have a certain gene change, you may be able to:

- Learn your chances of developing kidney disease
- Learn ways to stop kidney disease from getting worse, if you have it
- Learn your chances of passing it down to any children
- Join clinical trials specific to your gene change



Share your family health history with your doctor.

They will use this information and your personal health history to help you understand your chance of developing kidney disease.

A family history of kidney disease does not always mean you will get it.

But knowing this can help you look for signs early and make healthy choices.

To learn more about genetic testing, visit AKF's "Genetic testing and counseling for kidney disease" page.



How do I ask my family about their health history?

It can be hard to talk with family members about their health. They may feel anxious about sharing their personal information.



Here are some ways to make the conversation easier:

Start with family members you are close with

Ask family you are closest with to share their information and then ask if they can connect you with other family members you are less familiar with. They may also know information about family members who have passed away.

Share why you are asking

Let them know you are asking personal questions because sharing health information with each other can help prevent and diagnose illnesses (such as kidney disease) much earlier. For example: “People with diabetes have a higher chance of getting kidney disease. I want to learn if diabetes runs in our family so I can be prepared!”

Share your own experiences and other stories

Share some of your own medical history and concerns to make a family member comfortable with sharing their own.

For example: “I went to the doctor and I was diagnosed with diabetes.”

Ask during family gatherings

Consider asking about health history during family gatherings, such as:

- Birthday parties
- Church events
- Dinners
- Family reunions
- Holidays
- Weddings



You can then ask family members to follow up with you in private with more details.

Also share stories of people or families who benefited from learning their family health history.

You can read an example in this AKF blog post:



| Resources



Here are some AKF resources to learn more about kidney disease:

→ Learn more about family history and kidney disease



→ Learn about signs and symptoms of kidney disease



→ Learn about risk factors for kidney disease



→ Use AKF's "Know Your Kidneys" tool to learn about your current kidney health

After answering a few questions, this tool gives you a report of your current kidney health, your chance of developing kidney disease and ways to stay healthy.



Create your own family health history chart

For each family member, write down:

- If they had or have kidney disease, diabetes, heart disease, or any other health conditions
- The age they were diagnosed



When you are done, make copies or take a picture to share with your family and your doctor!



My mother's mother (grandmother)

☐ **Kidney disease**

age:

☐ **Diabetes**

age:

☐ **Heart disease**

age:

☐ **Other health conditions:**



My mother's father (grandfather)

☐ **Kidney disease**

age:

☐ **Diabetes**

age:

☐ **Heart disease**

age:

☐ **Other health conditions:**



My father's mother (grandmother)

☐ **Kidney disease**

age:

☐ **Diabetes**

age:

☐ **Heart disease**

age:

☐ **Other health conditions:**



My father's father (grandfather)

☐ **Kidney disease**

age:

☐ **Diabetes**

age:

☐ **Heart disease**

age:

☐ **Other health conditions:**



My mother

☐ **Kidney disease**

age:

☐ **Diabetes**

age:

☐ **Heart disease**

age:

☐ **Other health conditions:**



My father

☐ **Kidney disease**

age:

☐ **Diabetes**

age:

☐ **Heart disease**

age:

☐ **Other health conditions:**



me



My sibling (brother or sister)

☐ **Kidney disease**

age:

☐ **Diabetes**

age:

☐ **Heart disease**

age:

☐ **Other health conditions:**



Other family member (aunt, uncle, cousin)

☐ **Kidney disease**

age:

☐ **Diabetes**

age:

☐ **Heart disease**

age:

☐ **Other health conditions:**

