



YOUR FAMILY HISTORY – YOUR FUTURE

Your family history holds key information about your past and clues to your future health. Many of your physical traits (such as eye color, hair color, and height) are inherited. So, too, are risks for certain genetic conditions and health problems such as heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. You may have noticed that some of your relatives are healthier and live longer than other relatives. You may also have noticed that some relatives have the same health problems. By collecting your family's health history, you can learn what health problems you may be at increased risk for in the future and how to reduce your risks. For instance, people at increased risk for heart disease may be able to reduce their risk through not smoking, regular exercise and diet. Finding out your family history can benefit both you and your relatives... and it can be fun too!

HOW TO COLLECT A FAMILY HISTORY

You can collect your family history by talking to your relatives. Start with your parents if they are living. Older relatives are often good sources of information. Some relatives may not want to share their medical histories or they may not know their family history. However, whatever information you discover will be helpful. Vacations, holidays and family reunions can be good times to collect this information. As each generation ages, important information can be forgotten or lost – so now is the time to start your project! If you are adopted, you may be able to learn some of your family history through the parent(s) that adopted you or from adoption agency records.

Additional Sources of Information

Check whether your family has existing family trees, charts, listings of family members. Information may be recorded in baby books, birthday date books, or a family bible. Medical records are helpful but may be harder to obtain. There are offices in each state that have records of births, marriages and deaths. You can call the "County Clerk" office where you live (look in the "Government" section of the phone book) to find out how to get copies of these records. In addition, there are websites that have helpful resources for putting together family trees that you can find by searching for "genealogy." It is important to collect accurate information, so verify the medical history whenever possible.

HOW TO RECORD YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

One way to record a family history is by drawing a family tree called a "pedigree". Instructions for drawing a family tree can be found by [clicking here](#). You can also create and keep a written list of this information without drawing a pedigree. Either way, begin by writing down the medical and health information on:

- Yourself
- Your brothers and sisters
- Your children
- Your parents

Then go back a generation at a time. Include:

- Nieces and nephews
- Aunts and uncles
- Grandparents
- Cousins

For each relative, try to write down as many of these items as possible:

- Age or date of birth (and, for all family members who have passed on, age at death and cause of death). When the information is unavailable, write down your best guess (for example, "40's").
- Medical problems such as:
 - Cancer
 - Heart disease
 - Diabetes
 - Asthma
 - Mental illness

- High blood pressure
- Stroke
- Kidney disease
- Alcoholism
- Others

Note the ages at which the conditions occurred. Did Uncle Pete have his heart attack at age 42 or age 88?

Did your mother develop diabetes in childhood or as an adult?

- Birth defects such as spina bifida, cleft lip, heart defects, others.
- Learning problems, mental retardation.
- Vision loss/hearing loss at a young age (remember to record the age it began).
- For family members with known medical problems, jot down if they smoked, their diet and exercise habits, and if they were overweight. (for example, you could note that your brother John, who had a heart attack at age 40, weighs 300 lbs and smokes 2 packs a day).

After you draw your family tree, above your mother's side of the family tree write down where her family members came from (for example, England, Germany, Africa etc.); then do the same for your father's side of the family. This information can be helpful because some genetic health problems occur more often in specific ethnic groups.

WHAT TO DO AFTER YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR FAMILY TREE

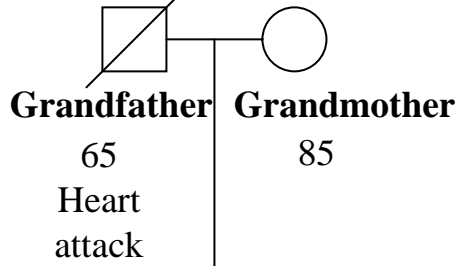
You should keep your family tree in a safe place and update it every couple of years (or update it at a regular family gathering, such as Thanksgiving). You can share a copy with your doctor, who may find it helpful in caring for your health. If you have concerns about your family history, you may wish to see a genetics specialist. To find genetics professionals in your area, contact the National Society of Genetic Counselors at www.nsgc.org; GeneClinics at www.geneclinics.org; or the American Society of Human Genetics at www.faseb.org/genetics. To find more information about the medical conditions present in your family and about support groups, contact the Genetic Alliance at www.geneticalliance.org.



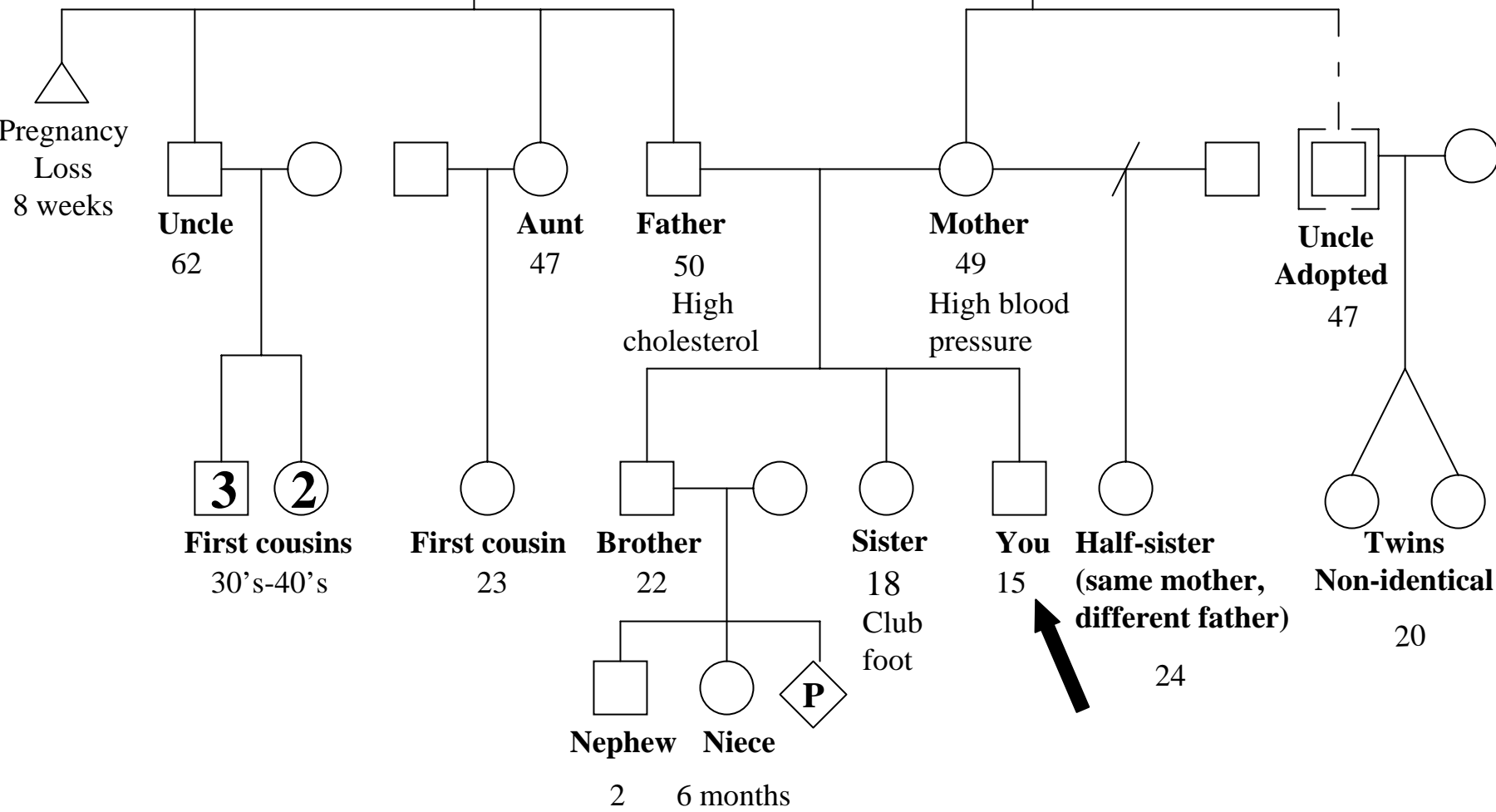
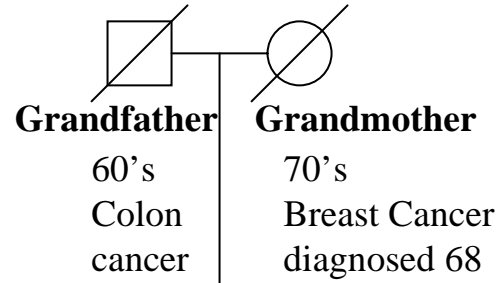
To Draw Your Family Tree

- Follow instructions in the “Your Family History-Your Future” guide. Make list of all of your family members.
- Use this sample family tree as a guide to draw your own family tree.
- Write your name at the top of your paper and date you drew your family tree.
- In place of the words father, mother etc., write the names of your family members.
- When possible, draw your brothers and sisters and your parents’ brothers and sisters starting with the oldest to the youngest, going from left to right across the paper.
- If dates-of-birth or ages are not known, guess (e.g. 50’s, late 60’s)

Mexico

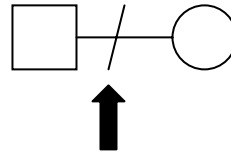


England and Germany

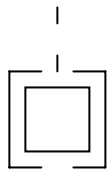


 Male / boy

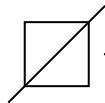
 Female / girl



**This line is used to show
parents who are divorced/not together**



Adopted



**← The diagonal line
is used to show that
the person has died.**



**Pregnancy loss.
Include number
of weeks, if known.**



SB

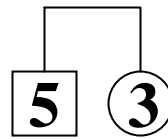
**SB stands
for stillbirth.
Include number of
weeks, if known.**



**P stands for
current pregnancy,
either unknown sex (diamond),
boy (square), or girl (circle)**

**What if there is limited information
about family members?**

➤ If you do not know names and ages of family members, but do know the number of boys and the number of girls, you can do this:



Example: This shows that there are 5 boys and 3 girls.

➤ If you do not know the number of boys and the number of girls, use diamond with number inside it (if total is known) or “?”.



Example: This shows that there are 8 children.