

YOUR HEALTH

Growing A Medical Family Tree

(NAPSA)—Going to your next family reunion could be good for your health—so could visiting family members or just talking with them on the phone. That’s the word from genetic counselors who say that time spent with loved ones can help you learn about your family health history and how it may relate to your health.

Knowing your family health history can provide information about risks for certain inherited conditions such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s and Huntington’s diseases, and help you take steps to limit your risks.

“Creating a medical family tree begins with communication,” says Kelly Ormond, president of the National Society of Genetic Counselors. “Spend time talking with your family members about their health history. Once you create a family tree, keep it in a safe place and keep it updated.” A family tree, otherwise known as a pedigree, shows links between family members and focuses on the medical and health information of each relative.

You can track your family’s history in just a few steps:

- Speak with relatives. Family reunions and vacations are good opportunities for relatives to contribute information.

- Make a list of family members, beginning with your parents and siblings, then go back one generation at a time.



It’s All Relative—A medical family tree can help keep you healthy.

- Write down each person’s age and birthday.

- List health conditions that affect each family member and include the age of onset. For relatives with known medical conditions, indicate if they smoked, their diet and exercise habits and if they were overweight.

- Include nationalities for each family member. Often, genetic problems are linked to specific ethnic groups.

Medical family trees can prove to be valuable not only for you but for your medical professional as well. Family trees can help doctors or genetic counselors identify health factors early on that may otherwise be overlooked—and that empowers people to take preventive measures.

For more information or to download a free family history tool, visit www.nsgc.org.