

# Knowledge is Power

Know your family history of heart disease.



Knowledge is one of your strongest weapons against heart disease. Diseases of the heart and blood vessels (cardiovascular diseases) can run in families. Therefore, knowing your family history can provide important information about your health risks. Ohio State's Richard M. Ross Heart Hospital and Division of Human Genetics encourage you to talk to your family about their heart health history. Create a heart health family tree that you and your doctor can use today – and the next generation of your family can use tomorrow.

## Creating Your Heart Health Family Tree

The first step is to talk to your immediate family:

- Parents
- Brothers and Sisters
- Children

## Next, reach out to extended family:

- Grandparents
- Aunts and Uncles
- Nieces and Nephews
- Half-Brothers and Half-Sisters

If possible, gather information about cousins, great-uncles and great-aunts. It's also important to include information on relatives who are deceased. Here is the type of information you'll want to gather:

***What heart conditions or related condition have family members been diagnosed with?***

***Proper names are best. Some examples include:***

- Aneurysm of a major blood vessel such as the aorta or in the brain
- Arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat)
- Bypass surgery of a blocked artery in the heart or legs
- Cardiomyopathy (heart muscle disease or an enlarged heart)
- Congenital heart defect
- Coronary artery disease

- Diabetes
- Died young or suddenly
- Fainting episodes
- Hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis)
- Heart attack
- Heart failure
- Heart transplant
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- High cholesterol
- Seizures
- Stroke or mini-stroke
- Sudden infant death syndrome

***How old were they when they were diagnosed?***

***Is the family member a twin (identical or fraternal)?***

Remember, your doctor may not be familiar with your family members. So it's also very helpful to provide information including each person's sex, age, ancestry (German, Moroccan, Japanese, etc.) and whether they're living or deceased. For those who are deceased, include how old they were when they died and what their cause of death was.



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## Turning Information into Action

Even though you cannot change your family history, knowing your family history can help you reduce your risk of developing heart disease. By talking to your doctor about your heart health family history, together you can look for red flags that might indicate the need for a prevention plan, preventive screenings and genetic counseling and potentially, genetic testing.

People with a family history of heart disease and related conditions may have the most to gain from screening tests and lifestyle changes. Your doctor may refer you to a specialist, such as a doctor trained specifically in genetics or a genetic counselor who can determine your genetic risks. Here are some examples of red flags that you can be “on the watch for” in your family history:

### Red Flags

- Heart disease at a young age in one or more close relatives (male before age 55 or female before age 65)
- Heart disease in both your mother and father
- Two or more close relatives on the same side of the family with the same or related conditions (heart disease, stroke, diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure)
- Sudden death in a relative who seemed healthy

- A relative who has been diagnosed with a specific type of hereditary heart disease. Many types of cardiomyopathy (heart muscle disease or an enlarged heart), arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat), aneurysm and cholesterol disorders are hereditary
- Two or more relatives on the same side of the family with a congenital heart defect

Additional red flags may exist and can be explored with your doctor or genetic counselor. By understanding your genetic risk factors, you and your doctor can take preventive measures that may save your life – and the lives of your loved ones.

## Take Charge of Your Life

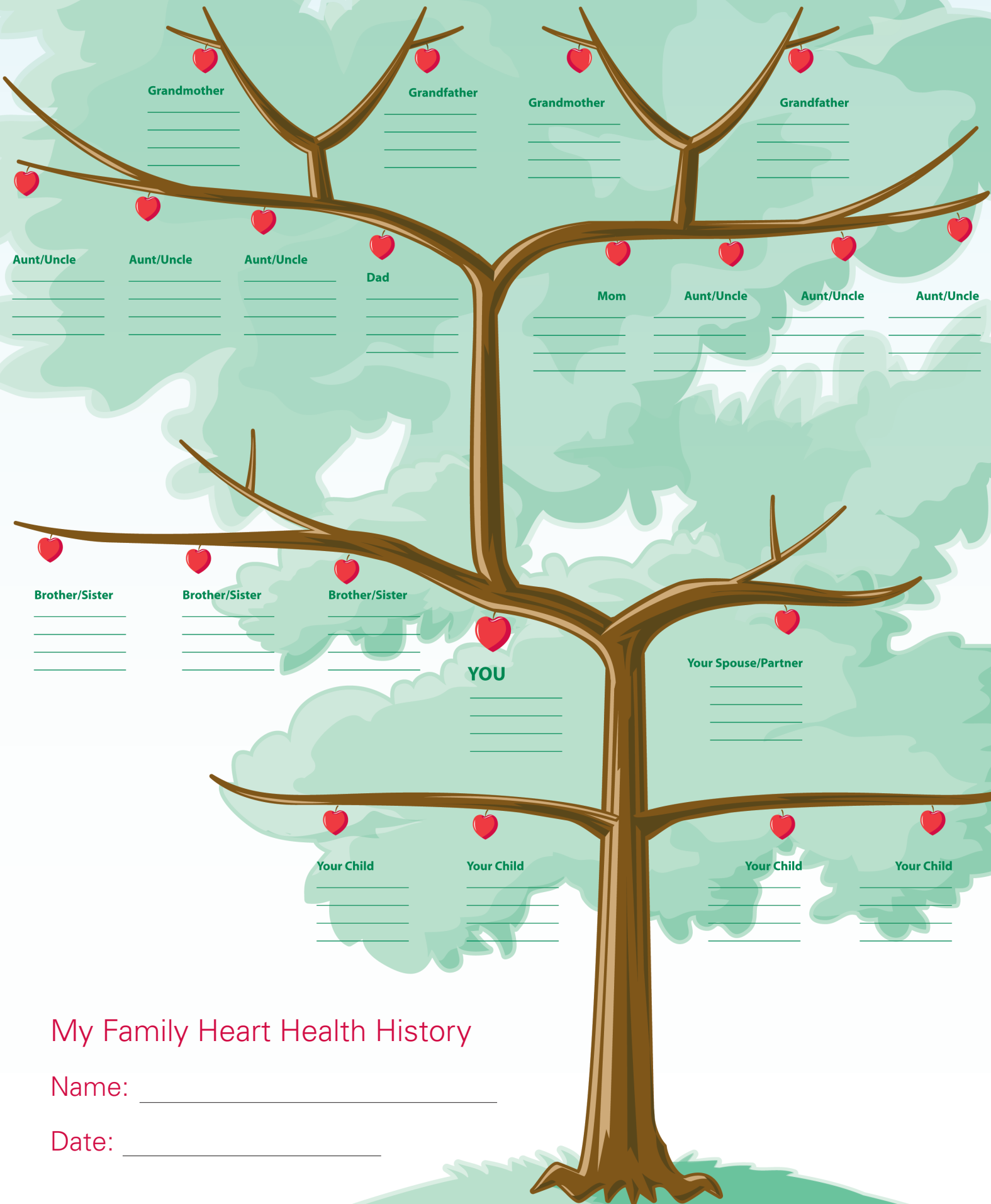
In addition to talking to your doctor about your family history, there are some additional things you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease:

- If you smoke, quit. If you don't smoke, don't start.
- Eat a balanced diet low in sodium and high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat or fat-free dairy products and lean meats.
- Get active and exercise often.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Manage your stress levels.
- Take medications prescribed by your doctor to control conditions such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes.



To learn more about your heart health family tree or if you were diagnosed with cardiovascular disease at a young age and would like to learn more, call the Medical Genetics Program at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center at (614) 293-6694 or toll-free at (888) 329-1654.

The Medical Genetics Program, in conjunction with the Division of Cardiovascular Medicine at Ohio State, offers several clinics that may benefit you and your family. These include the High Risk Family Heart Clinic and the Hereditary Heart Rhythm Disorders Clinic. The Medical Genetics Program and your doctor can help decide if one of these clinics might be right for you and your family.



## My Family Heart Health History

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

To complete a family history risk assessment for coronary heart disease (CHD) online, go to **<https://familyhealthlink.osumc.edu>**.

It takes less than 15 minutes to complete and could help determine your future heart health. Once you've entered your family's information, the tool provides a printable risk assessment that can help you, your family and your physician decide if increased screening or genetic testing should be considered. This tool focuses on risk for CHD and cancer.

The Ohio State University Heart and Vascular Center provides highly personalized care to patients and families alike. From the latest catheterization techniques to central Ohio's only adult heart transplantation program, Ohio State's Ross Heart Hospital supports every level of cardiovascular care using the most advanced cardiovascular technology available.

To learn more visit **[www.medicalcenter.osu.edu/heart](http://www.medicalcenter.osu.edu/heart)**.



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