

Great New Tool for Creating a Family Health History

By Jeff Cornett, RN MSN, Director of Training, Research, & Advocacy
Horizons in Hemophilia, Winter 2009

People with hemophilia, VWD, and other inherited bleeding disorders know that these conditions are passed down through their families genetically. Other more common diseases such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes can run in families. If one generation of a family has high blood pressure, it is not unusual for the next generation to have it also. Tracing the illnesses suffered by your parents, grandparents, and other blood relatives can help your doctor predict the disorders to which you may be at risk and take action to keep you and your family healthy.

Americans know that family history is important to health. A recent survey found that 96 percent of Americans believe that knowing their family history is important. Yet the same survey found that only one-third of Americans have ever tried to gather and write down their family's health history. To make the task easier, the Surgeon General has created a new computerized tool called "My Family Health Portrait." This computer program makes it fun and easy for anyone to create a sophisticated portrait of their family's health.

"My Family Health Portrait" is available through any computer that's connected to the Internet and is running an up-to-date version of any major Internet browser. The web-based tool helps users organize family history information and then print it out for presentation to the family doctor. In addition, the tool helps users save their family history information to their own computers and even share family history information with other family members.

The tool can be accessed at <https://familyhistory.hhs.gov/>. When you are finished organizing your family history information, the tool will create and print out a picture of your family's generations and the health disorders that may have moved from one generation to the next. It is a powerful tool for predicting any illnesses for which you should be checked. The U.S. Surgeon General makes the tool available for free to all users. No user information is saved on any computer of the U.S. federal government.

This article contains information provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.