

## FAMILY HISTORY

The family history is important, for several reasons in all families in which someone has a genetic condition. First, it provides information regarding the pattern of inheritance. Once the pattern of inheritance is known, proper genetic counseling can be provided and a recurrence risk quoted. For example, if a father and his son have a genetic disorder, it is probably inherited as an autosomal dominant, and the risk for other children to be affected is 50%. If unaffected parents have two or more children with a genetic condition, it is probably an autosomal recessive, and the risk for other children to be affected is 25%. Other patterns of inheritance can frequently be determined by taking a good family history. The family history should include information about close relatives of individuals with the disorder (parents, brothers, and sisters), as well as information on more distant relatives (aunts, uncles and cousins). For some disorders, distant relatives may be affected even if close relatives are not.

Second, the family history may identify individuals who don't know that they have the responsible gene. Some conditions may be so mild as to be unnoticed until a family history is taken and minor abnormalities discovered. For example, the most common Ectodermal Dysplasia (Hypohidrotic Ectodermal Dysplasia) is characterized by decreased perspiration, sparse blonde hair and missing teeth. If the mother of a child with this disorder has missing teeth or problems with perspiration, she may be a carrier of the condition and at risk for having another affected child.

The third reason for taking a family history is to determine how many individuals in the population have a specific disorder. Knowing how many people are affected is important when lobbying to obtain funds for research. Simply put, common disorders are more likely to get attention than rare disorders. As a rule, the number of affected individuals is greater than one would have expected before a search for affected individuals has been undertaken.

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## Supporting a normal lifestyle

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