

# Family History and Your Health

## This Thanksgiving Marks The 6th Annual National Family History Day !!

Thanksgiving Day, November 26th, 2009 marks the 6th annual National Family History Day. Family gatherings are a great time to talk with relatives about their health history. Talk about your family history; write it down; and discuss it with your doctor. When there is a known family history of serious health conditions, earlier screening is often encouraged for family members. Early, thorough screening generally leads to earlier detection and more treatable disease.

Of the 10 leading causes of death in Michigan, at least 9 could be important to record in your family health history. These include: heart disease, cancer, stroke, lung disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, kidney disease, serious infections, suicide (which can be related to depression/mental illness).

**Take the Thanksgiving Day Challenge...Talk with your family members, collect their medical history, and take your family health history to your health-care provider. The time is now!**

## What is Alzheimer's Disease ?

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive, degenerative disorder that affects brain function. This disease typically starts with slight memory loss and slowly becomes more severe and debilitating. Common findings with Alzheimer's disease include: confusion, poor judgment, loss of language skills, agitation, social withdrawal, and hallucinations. In rare cases, individuals can have seizures or muscle involvement with the disease. This can be similar to more broad spectrum dementia and a doctor should be consulted to make a formal diagnosis. About 25% of all Alzheimer's disease cases appear to be "familial" meaning that there is a family history of the disease.



## Top 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

(adapted from [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org))

1. Memory changes disrupting daily life
2. Difficulty planning or solving problems
3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks (at home or work)
4. Confusion with time or place
5. Trouble understanding visual or spatial relationships
6. New problems with language in speaking or writing
7. Misplacing things and lost ability to retrace steps
8. Decreased or poor judgment
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities
10. Changes in mood or personality

**November is  
National  
Alzheimer's  
Disease  
Month**

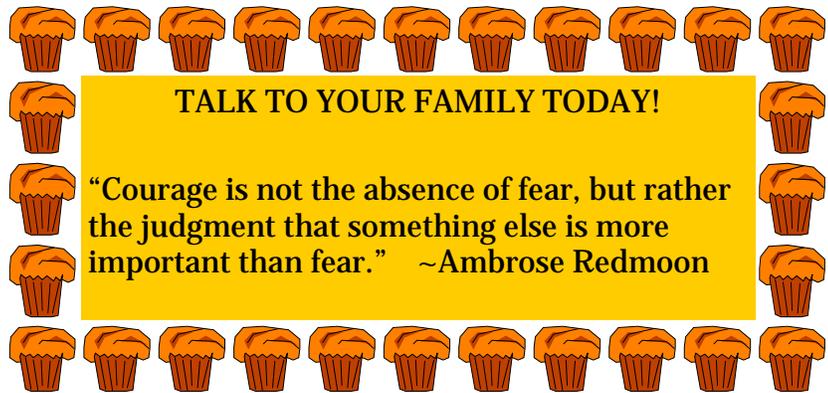
## Alzheimer's Disease: Is it Genetic?

Early onset Alzheimer's disease (diagnosed before age 65 and often before age 55) is known to be caused by one of three different genes. However, most cases of Alzheimer's disease are late onset (after age 65). It is clear that late

onset disease has a genetic component, however the exact genes responsible for late onset disease are not known. Many genes are suspected to play an important role in memory and brain functioning; but more scientific research is needed to confirm the possible role of these genes in Alzheimer's disease.

For early onset Alzheimer's Disease, some individuals are undergoing predictive genetic testing to learn whether or not they are likely to develop the disease. To evaluate the psychological and behavioral impact of learning such information, the

University of Michigan and Boston University are working through a grant from the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) and the National Institute on Aging (NIA) on a multi-center study. The **Risk Evaluation and Education of Alzheimer's Disease** (or REVEAL) study evaluates the psychological and behavioral impact of genetic risk assessment with the hope of devising an appropriate clinical strategy for testing. For more information visit <http://www.sph.umich.edu/hbhegenetics/reveal.html>.



**TALK TO YOUR FAMILY TODAY!**

**"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear." ~Ambrose Redmoon**

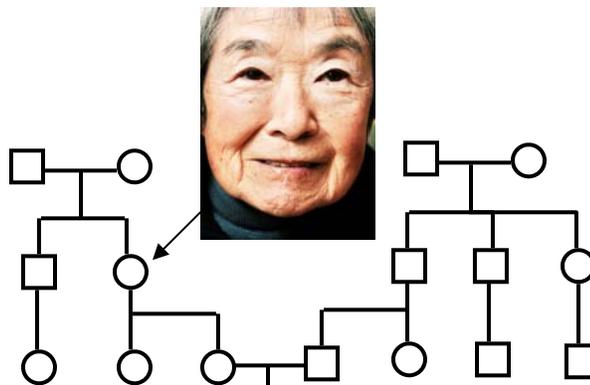
[www.alzheimers.org](http://www.alzheimers.org)  
[www.alz.org/gmc](http://www.alz.org/gmc)  
[www.dementiacoalition.org](http://www.dementiacoalition.org)  
[www.worriedaboutmemoryloss.com](http://www.worriedaboutmemoryloss.com)  
[www.geneclinics.org](http://www.geneclinics.org)  
[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

For more information on Family History and Genetic Disease, log onto [www.migeneticsconnection.org](http://www.migeneticsconnection.org).

## What Does Your Family Health History Look Like?

There is no "right" way to collect your family history. Some individuals simply list it out for their healthcare provider. But, if you've ever been to a Genetics Clinic, then you've probably seen a picture like this one:

Drawing a **pedigree** is a quick and easy way to draw out an entire family. In addition, you can add certain symbols to stand for different conditions such as Alzheimer's Disease.



Males are drawn as squares, females as circles. You can also add ages and most importantly, the age that a person was diagnosed with a condition.

**Try this method of family history collection with your family.**