

# Discovering Your Family's Medical History

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**A** *Medical Family Tree* can provide a branch-by-branch indication of the types of diseases that have been present in a family's past. Some of these diseases may be genetic in nature. By preparing a *Medical Family Tree* we can become more aware of any genetic factors that may put us at risk of developing heart and lung disease.

## How To Prepare Your Medical Family Tree

Where can you begin to pull together information about your genetic past? A number of tools, including the book *How Healthy is Your Family Tree?* by Carol Krause (Simon & Schuster, 1995), provide a great deal of useful information.

This instruction, which is based on Ms. Krause's book, will help get you started. Begin with a diagram of your family tree—we've included a sample diagram to use. Try to include at least four generations, if possible. Concentrate on family members who have a direct blood relationship to you.

First, start at the bottom. Put yourself and your siblings (brothers and sisters) on your *Medical Family Tree*. Then go up one level and add your parents and their siblings (your aunts and uncles) along with their children (your first cousins). Then go up another level and add



both sets of your grandparents and their siblings (your great-aunts and uncles). Finally, if possible, add all four sets of your great-grandparents. You are now ready to investigate the health status of each branch.

Second, talk to “family historians,” or “family gossips” who may know who died of what causes, or who suffered from what ailments during their lifetimes. Be sure to include the age at which such problems first appeared in your family members' lives. It is

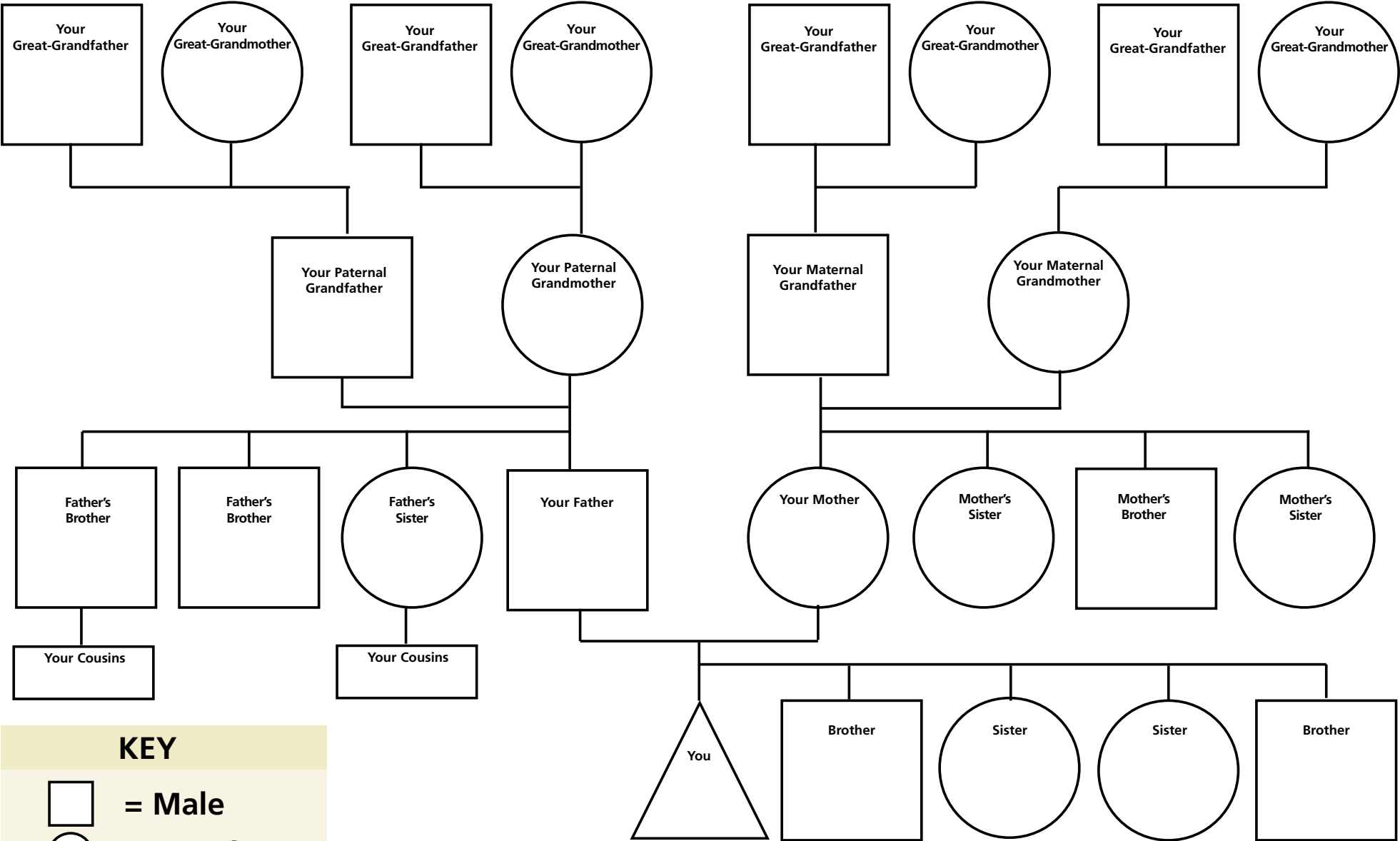
always valuable to gather such information from more than one individual to ensure accuracy.

Third, analyze your *Medical Family Tree*. Notice if heart or lung problems are associated with more than one member of your family. Be particularly alert to family members whose diseases began before age 60.

Finally, take your *Medical Family Tree* to your physician if your analysis reveals a pattern or has even one family member whose disease began at an early age. Your physician can help you understand your family history and make recommendations to watch for in your health.

**If you need a primary care physician, call the OSU Care Connection at (614) 293-5123.**

# SAMPLE FAMILY MEDICAL HISTORY DIAGRAM



**KEY**

□ = Male

○ = Female