



## HEART HEALTH:

# It's All In the Family

Several health conditions and diseases are hereditary, meaning they're passed down through your genes. Heart failure, irregular heartbeats called arrhythmias, and even high cholesterol can be inherited from your family. This is the reason doctors collect such detailed information about your family's health history—it helps tell the story of your personal health and any risk factors you carry in your genes.

Prioritizing preventive healthcare can help you manage or even mitigate such hereditary conditions. Consider the following three strategies to help you understand your risk and make the best possible choices for your health.

### 1. TALK ABOUT YOUR FAMILY HEALTH HISTORY

Develop open lines of communication with close relatives, like your parents and siblings. You should know if any of them have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease or any other health conditions, heart-related or not. This information is helpful for your healthcare providers to assess your risk for heart disease and other health concerns. Studies show that over 30% of risk factors for heart disease are determined by your genes.

To get a better picture of how your risk measures up, you should keep track of your family's health history.



[The Surgeon General](#) has a convenient digital tool to help you keep track of your family's health history.

### 2. DISCUSS FAMILY HEALTH HISTORY CONCERNS WITH YOUR DOCTOR

When you visit the doctor, they always ask about your family's health history. They use that information to develop context for any new or existing health issues you're experiencing.

If heart disease or related risk factors run in your family, it's important to ask questions and voice any concerns with your healthcare provider. Make the most of your time with your doctor(s) by bringing a list of questions to



your appointment—that way, you are less likely to forget. In many cases, your primary care provider can help. But if your risk is elevated or you're experiencing worrisome symptoms, they might refer you to a cardiologist.

### 3. BE PROACTIVE ABOUT YOUR HEALTH

Don't wait until there is a problem to see your doctor. In addition to preventing serious illnesses, there are several silent diseases that develop with age. Skipping regular doctor visits can leave those unchecked to cause further health issues.

Common silent heart-related health issues include high blood pressure, high cholesterol and even coronary artery disease. All of these can lead to serious complications including heart attack and death. Visit your doctor regularly so you catch heart health issues early.



### FOLLOW THE MOUSE:

We've hyperlinked resources you may want to access. Just hover and click!

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## START THEM EARLY: HEART HEALTH FOR KIDS

It's never too early to develop a heart healthy lifestyle, especially if heart disease runs in your family. Consider talking about living a heart-healthy lifestyle early with your entire family.

### LEARN ABOUT STRESS-REDUCING ACTIVITIES TOGETHER

Indulging in a comfort meal or sweets when you feel stressed out? In addition to directly harming your heart, stress can influence your decision-making around eating, substance use and other behaviors. These choices may eventually circle back to cause even more issues. Learning how to cope with stress in healthy ways can help curb these risks for you and your children.

Instead of folding under the pressure of stress, you can choose to use positive coping mechanisms:

- ◆ **Prioritize healthy sleep.** Set and maintain a healthy bedtime routine, with a ritual that includes washing your face, brushing your teeth, showering, or anything else you enjoy. Make sure you start your routine around the same time every night
- ◆ **Try meditation and breathing exercises.** When you feel stressed and notice your heart rate picking up, you can use deep breathing to help calm down
- ◆ **Lean into art, journaling and music.** Expressing your feelings in positive ways can also help you cope with stress. Pull out some paper and draw your feelings. Journal about your feelings and your day to help decompress after a stressful day. Or just throw on some music and dance it out



### SHOW THEM A HEALTHY DIET

Making healthy food choices is tougher than ever. You can get anything you want delivered with the tap of a few buttons on your phone, tablet or other device. Many of the choices are fast food, pizza, burgers and other things that taste good now, but don't make you feel good later.

Choosing healthy foods is easier if you create those habits early. Consider talking to your kids about why eating healthy matters. Don't be afraid to discuss how eating habits influence heart health and increase your risk for diabetes and other illnesses. Doing so will give them the tools they need to live a healthy lifestyle long after they leave home.

Not sure where to start? Here's a quick guide for easy weeknight sheet pan dinners you can make as a family!

Choose 1 Protein:	Choose 2+ Vegetables:	Prepare:	Bake at 400°
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Chicken breast</li> <li>◆ Chicken thighs (with or without the bone)</li> <li>◆ Shrimp</li> <li>◆ Salmon</li> <li>◆ Sausage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Broccoli</li> <li>◆ Squash</li> <li>◆ Onions</li> <li>◆ Diced potatoes</li> <li>◆ Carrots</li> <li>◆ Green beans</li> <li>◆ Cherry tomatoes</li> <li>◆ Asparagus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Drizzle with olive oil and prep with your favorite seasonings</li> <li>◆ You can add a sauce to your protein after it's done cooking if you'd like!</li> <li>◆ Substitute your protein with tofu for a vegan/vegetarian option</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Seafood: 15-20 minutes</li> <li>◆ Everything else: 30-40 minutes</li> </ul>



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### EXPLAIN THE IMPORTANCE OF REGULAR EXERCISE

Kids are energetic. Many of them keep active by being outside, joining sports teams and playing with their friends—but all good things come to an end. As kids get older their activity preferences change. They find other forms of entertainment, like video games and social media. They spend less time being physically active and more time on their devices. Here are some alternatives to screentime:

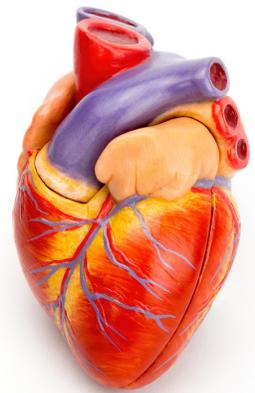
- ◆ Hiking a nearby park or trail
- ◆ Playing low-pressure team sports with friends
- ◆ Going for a walk around the neighborhood
- ◆ Visiting a rock-climbing gym
- ◆ Dancing around the house to their favorite music
- ◆ Participating in interactive video games that include dancing, exercise or boxing

Spend some time talking to your kids about why regular exercise is important while they're still excited to be active. Focus on the heart and whole health benefits of exercise: it reduces your risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and other conditions.

### TEACH THEM ABOUT HEART HEALTH

Health literacy is your ability to make informed decisions about your health. Health is a complex topic, so many people have lower health literacy than they need—especially in the time after receiving a new diagnosis. Learning about heart health doesn't have to be boring either. You can make it fun by working on fun heart and health related activities while you talk to your children. Try these:

- ♥ Print out an anatomical heart for each of your children to color or paint while you discuss the benefits of a heart-healthy lifestyle. heart health
- ♥ Grab some clay from an art shop so you can sculpt a heart together
- ♥ Use some glue to arrange your choice of cereal, pasta, beans, and/or other dry goods in a heart shape
- ♥ Get an **anatomical heart model** so you can learn about the different parts of the heart while you talk about heart health



Give your kids a leg up if they have a family history of heart disease or related conditions. Talk to them about which conditions run in your family, what symptoms they cause and how they can reduce their risk. You'll be giving them the tools they need to manage their own health throughout their lives.

Speak with your Primary Care Physician (PCP) regarding your family's health history and any concerns you might have. If you do not have a PCP, you may call the Health Advocate number on your BCBSIL member ID card or [log on to Blue Access for Members<sup>SM</sup> \(BAM<sup>SM</sup>\) bcbsil.com](#) and use the Provider Finder. This fast, easy-to-use tool improves members' experience when searching for in-network health care providers.



SOURCES: [UChicagoMedicine.org](#), [MountSinai.org](#), [DietaryGuidelines.gov](#), [Heart.org](#), [CDC.gov](#), [Heart.org \(stress\)](#)