



American Heart Association.

EmPOWERED to Serve™

Know Your Family Health History

LESSON PLAN

Call to Action

To get a clear picture of your risk of heart disease, it's important to know your family's health history. Create a family tree of at least the last three generations. When you know your inherited risk factors, you can make lifestyle changes to reduce them.

Community Need

You can inherit several cardiovascular conditions from family:

- If your parents or other close blood relatives have high blood pressure, you have an increased chance of having it. African Americans tend to have high blood pressure more often than other people in the United States.
- Familial hypercholesterolemia (FH) affects how the body recycles LDL (bad) cholesterol. People with FH have a five times higher risk for coronary heart disease over a 30-year span.
- Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) results from abnormal genes that cause the heart muscle cells to enlarge, thickening the walls of the ventricles and blocking blood flow. One in 500 people has HCM, which is the most common cause of sudden cardiac death in people under age 35.
- Cardiomyopathy is a heart muscle disease that can lead to heart failure because it causes the heart to weaken over time.
- Thoracic aortic aneurysms and dissections cause the body's major artery to balloon and rupture. Aortic aneurysms are the main cause of 9,846 deaths and a contributing cause in more than 16,147 deaths in the United States each year, according to the CDC's most recent annual statistics.
- Arrhythmia, which is a fast, slow, or irregular heartbeat, can be deadly.



Three Important Points

Most of us are in information overload. We will focus on three key points:

- Knowing your family's health history is important to your heart health.
- You can learn more about your risk of heart disease from your family's health history.
- A healthy lifestyle can reduce your risk of heart disease.

Preparing for the Lesson

- Budget at least 30 minutes to present the lesson.
- Review the speaker notes prior to the lesson to be familiar with the information and know what additional resources are used.
- If handouts are referenced in the presentation, distribute the pages before the lesson.
- Additional resources are available on the Resources List PDF. These could be added to lengthen the presentation or provide ideas for small group discussion. You may also provide the Resources List PDF to the attendees so they have links to information discussed in the lesson.

Program Materials

No access to a computer projector? Print the slides and use them as a script to teach your health lesson.

- Flip chart and markers
- Handouts (one copy per participant):
 - My Family Health Tree bit.ly/3doT38u
 - Life's Simple 7 Eat Better Infographic bit.ly/39QSJgL
 - African Americans & Cardiovascular Diseases bit.ly/3sVEq1A
 - Hispanics and Heart Disease, Stroke bit.ly/2O7EgWf
- Pens/Pencils



- Goody bags (optional): Ask hospitals, wellness centers, clinics and other health organizations to donate giveaways for participants. Also, visit the American Heart Association online store (ShopHeart.org) or the American Diabetes Association online store (ShopDiabetes.org) for pamphlets or recipe booklets.

Audiovisual Needs

- Projector for PowerPoint slides
- Internet connection (optional)

Wrap-Up

Reminder! After participants leave, please complete the Ambassador Questionnaire.

Slide Program with Talking Points and Discussion Questions

The “Notes” section of the PowerPoint slides includes scripted comments to help you walk through the lesson. To engage participants, the talking points also include these potential discussion questions:

- Do you know your family’s health history? Are you aware of family members who have heart disease?
- How many generations of family history do you know?
- Do you think you’re a potential candidate for a genetic test? Why or why not?
- Do any members of your family have high cholesterol? Have you been monitoring your cholesterol?
- Are you surprised by the cardiovascular disease statistics on African Americans and Hispanics?
- Are you concerned that you are going to have heart disease because a close member of your family has one?
- Are you doing any of the American Heart Association’s recommended healthy lifestyle habits? Do you feel like you can incorporate any into your daily routine right away?