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HEALTH & MEDICINE FOR PHYSICIANS  
**HIPPOCRATES**

# What Family History Can Tell You

Making Sense of Your Patients' Inherited Risks



**THE RIGHT  
TO LIVE**

Inside the Ethics of  
Saving the Tiniest  
Infants (page 42)

**7 WAYS WE  
TORTURE OUR  
PATIENTS**

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Stop (page 61)

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Why It's on the  
Rise (page 70)

*All in the family:  
Howard, 88, and  
Jasper, 20 months.  
What does the  
great-grandfather's  
health say about  
the child's?*



TO SEE THE  
**FUTURE** *Look*

TWENTY YEARS AGO, AL PONCIA, CENTER, AND HIS INFANT SON, LOREN, POSED WITH HIS FATHER, ALFRED, AND GRANDFATHER, ANGELO. ALFRED HAD A HISTORY OF STROKE AND LIVED TO AGE 69; ANGELO ENJOYED ROBUST HEALTH AND LIVED TO AGE 101.



## Tracing their family health history may be the most important step your patients ever take toward long life.

BY STEVEN FINCH

AS A CHILD KATHI MARANGOS always found her birthday cake a bit hard to swallow. Each sugary bite reminded her of a mother who gave her up for adoption and of a family she didn't know. But she recalls her 18th birthday as especially bittersweet.

"That's when my mother found me," she says. "She hired a private detective so she could give me information about my family."

Marangos felt at once transformed—into the proud daughter of a ski lodge manager and a Harvard graduate. But at the same instant she felt the chill from her family's dark side: its frightening predisposition for depression, heart disease, and colon cancer.

Today, at 35, Marangos, with her doctor's help, keeps an eye out for any sign of cancer while she makes sure her family sticks to a low-fat diet. "I'm so glad to know my medical history," she says, "to know I can use it to protect myself and my kids from our genetic shortcomings."

If only more Americans would see the light, says Michael Crouch, director of the Baylor Family Practice Residency Program in Houston and a leading expert on inherited risks. Patients who trace their roots to learn their family's health history may be doing the single most important thing they could to bolster their well-being.

Why? Because any disease that runs in the family puts the current generation at risk. Regardless of whether the risks stem from a person's genetic code or from habits nurtured in childhood, many family-linked ills can be kept

into the past

PHOTOGRAPH BY ART ROGERS