

Family Reunion

Diabetes: A Family Matter

Brief Description:

Families often live many miles apart and have busy lives. A family reunion is a planned opportunity to be with the people you love, review past memories, and share your family heritage. Family reunions encourage family members to reconnect and get updated on family news.

This activity suggests having a family reunion with *Diabetes: A Family Matter* as its theme. Do you or others in your family have diabetes? This disease is often a concern for many in a single family because multiple family members may be diagnosed with the disease. It is a disease often shared across generations. Adults and children are at risk for diabetes and concerns are growing worldwide. The good news is that diabetes can often be prevented or delayed by things like reducing your portion size, eating a healthier diet, and increasing your activity. Help spread the news of diabetes prevention by making it the theme for your next family reunion.

A family reunion with a *Diabetes: A Family Matter* theme provides a way to focus on healthy living and disease prevention. Family members often share risks for some diseases. Who in your family has diabetes? Are there high risks for more family members to have this disease? Often when grandparents or parents have type 2 diabetes, children and grandchildren also are at risk. You can do something about this disease! Making even small changes in daily life can result in longer and healthier lives. One suggestion is to use your family

reunion to focus on facts about diabetes, ways to prevent it altogether, and ways to delay its onset or complications. Family reunions can be a great vehicle for sharing ways to improve health.

Use the family reunion as a way to convey information about healthy active lifestyles. In the past, people at family reunions not only ate and talked together, but they also played games and had fun together. Many different ways to increase awareness about diabetes are possible. You are only limited by time, imagination, and maybe money. You can also inform everyone about better ways to manage diabetes. Care management has changed over time and some of the old ways for taking care are no longer useful. Sometimes, things learned in the past have changed. The reunion is a good way to share updated information.

Several ideas are suggested for your family reunion. Find those family members who are the best at organizing events and offer to help them plan a memorable family reunion. Make your reunion a success and one that family members will want to repeat in years to come.

Objectives:

1. Inform family members how to prevent diabetes.
2. Inform family members how to manage diabetes.
3. Inform family members about the importance of family support.

Participants:

You will want to include as many family members as possible that are part of your family tree. Your first decision will be to decide your invitation list. Perhaps this is a family reunion where both sides of the family will be invited. Whatever you choose, the event will take some careful planning.

Costs:

It is critical to decide how you will pay for your reunion. For a successful reunion, create a budget, collect money, and use it appropriately. Who in the family is good at managing money? Would that person act as the family treasurer?

You may want to form a budget committee. As you create the budget, be sure to include as much as possible because small items can quickly add up to large sums. Once you know how much money you need, decide how it will be collected. Be sure to plan something that everyone in the family can afford! If you plan to collect money ahead of time, set a deadline for when the money is due. Keep records of the amount collected and the person(s) who contributed. Keep records of all expenses and where the money was spent. Be prepared to share these things with the family at the reunion. Make it clear that everyone is responsible for their own travel expenses and costs. If you plan to meet at a hotel or if many will be traveling from other places, the planning committee may want to assist with making these arrangements.

An auction is one way to raise money for next year's family reunion or at least get you started. Your family could also use an auction to share with others by raising money for your local community's diabetes

coalition or some other local diabetes cause. Perhaps the person spending the most money on a single item earns the right to choose an agency that will receive the money collected. Each family should bring at least one item to auction. Suggested auction items can be things linked with fun and family. They might also be service items such as providing a Sunday dinner, mowing grass, shoveling snow, washing a car(s), etc. The auction can also be a way to have fun as cherished items are placed for auction. Other things might be family related such as an old hat worn by someone everyone recognizes, a first ball glove, an iron skillet used for years by the family breakfast chef, a photo album of last year's family reunion, etc. Tagging a bit of family history to an item can make it more valuable! Ask family members to be creative and have fun with the auction. If your family reunion focuses on diabetes, family members could bring items related to a healthy active lifestyle. This would certainly challenge the family to give some thought about what these items could be. Decide who will be the auctioneer and plan on having great fun.

A raffle is another way to raise money for family reunion costs or to provide a donation to a local diabetes organization or coalition group. Someone in the family might want to donate a family heirloom such as a quilt, rocking chair, cradle, or other object that has been in the family for a long while. A great way to increase the value of the object is to write the object's history and place it in a frame to accompany the item. Be sure to sell enough tickets and charge enough money to cover the cost if an item is purchased rather than donated. If you want to continue to share the heirloom, you may decide that the winner has the right to keep the item for a

year before bringing it back for the next family reunion. This way, many different family members may enjoy a cherished family item and the money raised each year can help support some local work to prevent diabetes. If you plan either an auction or a raffle, you will need someone to be the banker and keep records of what was collected and spent.

Some final ways to think about paying for costs linked with a family reunion could be a registration fee that covers costs of t-shirts and other items you want to include in the event. Remember to keep costs reasonable as some families might have less money to spend. Perhaps a family member that is a bit more comfortable with finances will choose to donate some funds to cover others. Perhaps you just want to pass the hat or ask folks to give what they can. Families are different and so you will need to decide what will work best.

Activity Duration and Location:

A family reunion might last for a single day or across a weekend. Your family will need to decide what best suits their needs. If people are traveling from great distances, you might want to plan a number of events that occur over several days. However, if most people live nearby and often see one another, a one-day event may be perfect.

The place you select for your reunion is important. Some families like to have a reunion at a homeplace, a place that has some historic family meaning, or a place near older family members. Others choose parks, rent halls or spaces, or even use a hotel or resort. It is usually important to choose a place close to most family members and one that everyone can afford.

Planning:

Creating a family reunion around diabetes concerns will take some planning. Form a family committee and oversee each aspect of the reunion (e.g., location arrangements, budget, invitations, menu, record-keeping, social activities, auction, raffle, t-shirts, set-up, clean-up, etc.). The more people you get involved, the less work it is for others. Choose someone who is organized and able to delegate to lead the committee's work. Keep records of what was done so that these can be passed to next year's committee.

Create a guest list that includes names, addresses, and contact information such as home phone, cell phone, or e-mail. Be sure to include people from each branch of the family that can assist you in finding everyone that should be included. You will likely want to keep this list, update it at each reunion, and have it available for future reunions.

If your plans include invitations for large numbers of people, a survey or email to family members may help you to get input as reunion planning begins. Your survey may ask for preferences regarding locations, dates, type of reunion, costs, etc. Be sure to give a date for when you need their responses. Keep in mind that many reunion sites require advanced reservations which may require that you gather family input early in your planning process.

Invitations should contain special information about the event. If you plan to make your reunion diabetes focused, you will need to give some thought about what you will include. You will need to create a brief letter to explain the purpose of the reunion and announce the theme (i.e.,

“Let’s Get Healthy Reunion”). Maybe the invitation should include a letter that tells about those that have diabetes in the family and explains the purpose of the reunion theme. You might use the idea of *Diabetes: A Family Matter* to convey ideas about risks. Your invitations may also include some practical items as well. For instance, if extra tables or chairs are needed, you may ask folks to bring theirs with them.

Activities:

Enlist the help of a few fun-loving family members who are concerned about diabetes prevention and healthy living to develop activities that build on your reunion theme. If you plan to have a number of things occurring during your reunion event, you might want to have a program that outlines the plans or events for the reunion. You may want to give this to your family members ahead of time so they can plan appropriately and bring clothing and items that allow them to participate. Be sure to think about activities that would work for all ages. For instance, most family members can participate in a contra dance, play a round of croquet, or throw a beanbag.

It is always a challenge to mix and mingle with family members who are less acquainted with one another. Family members will not likely know each other well and it is important to make sure that both old and young all enjoy a sense of connection at the reunion. Providing nametags can be a way to help people identify one another. Getting acquainted activities, “ice breakers” are important to plan. You can access many fun examples of icebreakers simply by doing a search on the internet or visiting your local library.

Be sure to have a sign-in sheet for all family members as they arrive. Gather information about young and old and be sure to note the family connections. This is also a good time to gather and update contact information for the next year’s reunion. You may want to have this information available to share with others after the reunion. This also provides contact information for next year.

The Food:

A main event for any family reunion is food and feeding a large group of people is always tricky!

When you begin to think about the food you would like to have available at your reunion, a theme around diabetes prevention or healthy living requires some planning.

Families like to eat when they gather and often the foods best liked are not the healthiest for everyday eating. When people hear the term diabetes or “sugar diabetes,” they often think first about all the things they cannot have. When families gather together for the reunion, it is not the time to make people feel guilty about what they do or do not eat. It is a day to have fun and enjoy being together. Living with diabetes today includes many wonderful food choices that will support both healthy eating and healthy appetites!

At your reunion, serving celery sticks and ‘rabbit food’ is not likely to be acceptable! Creativity is required as you plan the menu and think about ways to give important facts. No matter what you plan, tasty food is essential! Potluck meals are a favorite for many. Ask people to bring a favorite healthy dish to share might be an approach. You may also think about providing some tasty and healthy recipes to your family members

so that everyone can help in the preparation. Favorite family foods that represent your family traditions and culture are important to maintain. Family reunions are not the time to make everyone worry about counting carbs or calories. Rather, it is a good place to promote a wide variety of foods that promote healthy living and eating in moderation.

Diabetes: A Family Matter is certainly connected with what we eat! Think about creative ways you can teach the family about healthy eating. Maybe use placemats that show correct portion sizes or have a picture of a healthy meal. Everyone could draw a picture on their placemat made of butcher paper. Then have everyone 'show' what they have done and 'share' a story about the picture's meanings. Have a few judges and give prizes for different age groups for the best art work and another for the story that goes with the art work. Having fun around a topic can still be a good way to learn about healthy eating!

The Fun:

There are many ways that your reunion can be organized around fun and meaningful activities while emphasizing healthy living. Here are two examples, the "Family Heritage" and "Family Olympics" reunions.

"Family Heritage"

Each family has a rich history of traditions and family stories. You may want to create a family reunion that centers on your family heritage that also includes a healthy focus.

First you will want to think carefully about the messages you want to convey. Be sure to include activities that will appeal to all ages and further family knowledge of

shared heritage. You might want to provide a family tree drawn on a great sheet of paper. Or, you might want each family to bring a family tree with the information they know and have copies they can share with others. These can all be collected and then put into a more complete family tree after the reunion by a team that is interested in continuing the work. If family members share old photos with names and dates and locations of where they are taken and perhaps some captions to accompany them, these can be compiled after the reunion and perhaps a family album created that can be made available to others. It is important to help family members connect themselves to the larger family tree.

One activity for a "Family Heritage" themed reunion is the sharing of stories. Story telling has been an important part of the lives and memories of those living near the Appalachian Mountains. For this activity, family members gather and share stories with each other. These stories may be linked to a family photo or a family heirloom. Members may share a story that has been told across generations. This is a great time to play music and sing songs that have been important in the family's life. Young people today rarely tell stories in the same ways that they were communicated in the past. This theme encourages a reunion where the past is honored and younger members are given a chance to learn more about the family roots. Having someone film the sharing of these stories and then making a copy for each family member later will provide a way to capture the stories for future family members.

As part of this film or as an entirely separate activity, you could have someone film interviews with family members. Ask older

members to share stories from their youth as they recall toys and games, hobbies, school memories, childhood homes and neighborhoods, and important life events. Someone in the family can ask the questions and someone else can film. This film might need a bit of editing or it can just be copied and shared after the reunion. If the family has a website, perhaps the film can rest here.

If the 'Family Heritage' theme is used, it will be important to get around to talking about family genes and how some families are more likely to be at risk for certain health problems than others. Not only are genes passed from one generation to another, but today we have to also be concerned that our habits and behaviors are often passed to others as well. For example, the things, places, and times we eat are often shared actions in families. While families in the past often ate together on a regular basis, today this may rarely happen. Family routines today might mean that people do not all eat the same meal, at the same place, or at the same time. This becomes part of the 'Family Heritage.' Some family routines are not ones that lead to good health. Finding ways to create healthier family routines is something families can work on together.

If you have family members that have already been diagnosed with diabetes, you might want to find some special ways to include them. Too often diabetes and its risks are not talked about in families. In fact, it is possible that some members may not even be aware of who in the family has diabetes. If this has long been a problem in your family, then it might be interesting to have a family tree that identifies this genetic or family risk. Ask those with

diabetes to tell a story about what it is like to live with the disease. If you have several people then you might want to have a panel discussion. Have a question and answer session. Be sure to talk about ways family members can best support those with diabetes. You will want everyone to leave with some information about diabetes. It is a good thing to have some diabetes facts and brochures available for those that might want to take them home. Ask a local diabetes educator about some good things to share with others.

You may want to be creative and think about how to be sure that every family member leaves the reunion with some facts about healthy lifestyles and how they need to be passed on in the family. Perhaps setting some family goals to be reported next year will help. For example, you might want to give everyone a sheet of paper that suggests they think of these three things every day:

- A way to be a little more active each day.
- A way to make eating habits healthier.
- A way to have more family fun together.

Give each family member something to help them be healthy. For example, give out jump ropes, hula hoops, or pedometers to encourage activity.

Don't forget the musical talents of family members! Ask them to plan ahead of time to play and sing songs that have had meaning to the family. Bring some rhythm instruments to get everyone involved. Spoons, old tin cans, plastic buckets, and a washboard can become prized ways for having even the youngest members join. If

you want to make a challenge that can be prepared ahead of time, ask family groups to be ready to share a favorite family song and provide the lyrics for all to sing. They might conclude with a story about how the song was chosen and how it came to have meaning for them. These types of activities give family members a chance to learn about other kinfolks that they do not know as well, but still call family.

If you create a family website, these family heritage activities can become part of your family history and can be shared with others that were unable to attend the reunion. Develop a family team that includes extended kin members who can help support one another and find ways to talk to one another after the reunion. Use cell phones or text messages to encourage one another. Not only is *Diabetes: A Family Matter*, being healthy is also a family matter.

“Family Olympics”

In using this theme, you will want to emphasize the importance of having a healthy and active lifestyle. You may want to consider ways this theme can be conveyed through the food you eat, the activities you plan, and the ideas you share.

If you decide to have a *Family Olympics*, you will need to identify an Olympic Chair well before the family reunion. In fact, you may need a committee of people to organize the events and plan for awards and ceremonies, etc. T-shirts could be used to differentiate family teams if you want to add a spark of competition. Be sure to factor in these costs as you plan! Invitations about the reunion can describe the theme and plans for the event. Find ways to involve everyone in a good time. Having fun and even being silly

can actually be more important than winning, skill, or prizes. Of course, you will need someone as the Master-of Ceremonies or the one who will present the awards. You will need some judges and perhaps some time-keepers. If you have a family trumpeter or a good bluegrass band, you may want them to play music for the beginning of the event and the award ceremonies.

Use of computer graphics and some ribbon make it easy to create medals and awards. Use a large poster board to depict the Olympic symbol of five linked rings (rings are blue, black, red, yellow, & green). Be sure to include your family name and year as you name the Olympic event. You may want to schedule the events to occur right after the main meal has been eaten. A ‘Parade of Families’ with everyone wearing their t-shirts can begin the event. Of course, creating t-shirts or sashes could even be part of the event. Just like the real Olympics, it is okay to have more than one thing going on at a time.

The types of events you plan will need to accommodate a wide variety of ages and activity levels. You need some events for those who are younger or have greater endurance, as well as activities for those who are older and less agile. Make plans so that everyone can take part! For example, planning ahead for a chair-rocking contest of the older generation can give a way to involve them in a contest they might enjoy. Use your imagination for games you might create or include. Long skinny balloons can become javelins for those with more limited physical abilities. Things like boating, swimming, fishing, hiking, and biking might be possibilities. Plan a ball game, soccer, Frisbee, volleyball, or other team activity. Pair some of the younger family members

with older ones to form teams for at least 1 or 2 competitions. Get everyone moving and taking part in some ways.

See some of the other activities included in the *Toolkit Activities* on the website <www.diabetesfamily.net> and consider ways to make them part of your 'Family Olympics.' Be sure to have a great celebration at the end of the day and recognize the efforts of all. Perhaps the take-home prize is some tips for how families can stay active together as they have fun and gain health.

Ways to Extend the Activity:

The family reunion does not have to end when all the good-byes have been said. No matter what the theme for your event, you can continue to talk to each other long after it is over. One way to bridge the actual family reunion with continued contact over the year is through family photographs. Pictures are worth a thousand words and most everyone enjoys looking at themselves and others.

Choose someone to be the designated photographer during your reunion. You might want to ask a teenager or two to take pictures throughout the day, but ask them to keep the secret about how the photos will be displayed online. Pictures need to be taken and shared with a large dose of humor! Explain the kind of pictures you want to have taken. For example, perhaps you want to address healthy diet and smaller portion sizes. Then, the photographer can take pictures of people's plates of food. Perhaps, it might be best to only take pictures of the food plates after people go through the potluck dinner line. You might want to avoid including pictures

of individuals with the plates. It is important to not do something that would be hurtful.

The pictures could go on a family reunion photo website where everyone in the family can later take a look. If you do not know how to do it yourself, enlist younger family members who are familiar with computers and ask them to help you put these pictures and some text online. Be sure that everyone who helps also receives credit for their talents and help in the project.

You will have to tell everyone how to find them. The pictures are likely to show the large portions we too often consume. Captions can be attached to the photos should offer a bit of humor. They should also be written with care. You may want to speak with a local dietician and ask them to help you find ways to do this with sensitivity. You certainly do not want to offend someone.

Perhaps a message at the top of the photo page might be: "What will this family's health be like if we keep eating like this?" Other photos might be of the foods prepared on the potluck table prior to everyone serving themselves. "Try to find the fruits and vegetables" could be a bit of text to go with these pictures. 'Dessert table' photos could come with some text such as: "How many carbs on this table?" or "Just say no!" If you want to be direct, you may say something like, "Everything in moderation!" or "A little bit won't hurt, but too much too often might be like standing next to a ticking bomb." Then give the facts about diabetes risks for the family. A family blog can be used to discuss the photos, give a place for fun and humor, but also be a way to give healthy eating facts.

Another set of pictures could be of family members at the reunion being active and having fun. Add captions such as, “We REALLY need to do this more often!” “They are on their way to a healthy life!” Other photos could show young and old together having fun, laughing, or being silly. Captions to go with them might say something like, “Family reunions need to happen more often.” Use of the internet can make it easy to share these photos and describe things that are family risks. You could then suggest some things that the family might do to get more active. This is a good way to give information to family and keep the reunion going after the main event.

Here is another activity you might do! After the reunion, find a volunteer or more to create a family newsletter. Maybe other family members can be in charge of e-mailing it to everyone. This is a good way to share some post-reunion stories, photos, and news items. If you collected family information, have someone help create an updated genealogy chart as well. This is a great way to get people excited about the next reunion, as well as include family members who were not able to attend. Because reunions mostly occur during the summer and early fall, you could ask families to each send a brief update after the holidays to share what happened at their house, tell who visited, and include a picture. A newsletter is also an excellent way to begin sharing some facts about healthy living. Ask family members to share a cherished family recipe that has been adapted with healthy ingredients. You can also talk about diabetes risks, ways to prevent diabetes, and tips about care for those with diabetes. You can find plenty of information about these topics at the *Diabetes: A Family Matter* website. A

newsletter can make diabetes visible in your family by sharing success stories and offering one another support.

A final thing to consider for a family reunion is the creation of a family tree. A wall poster can be made and given the next year to those attending the reunion. Including old photos of shared ancestors or past family reunions can make this poster a new family heirloom that will hold value for years to come.

Family Reunion Activity Planning:

<http://family-reunion.com/activity.htm>

Final Word:

If you have a family reunion where health or diabetes is the focus, please be sure to go to the *Diabetes: A Family Matter* website <www.diabetesfamily.net> and share with others what worked and what did not work. A place on the Communicate Section of the website will be available for sharing your ideas about family reunions. If you have a family website that pertains to your reunion, you might want to post the link to the website so that others can take a look.

Ideas for Family Reunion Committee Heads:

Finance/Fundraising: _____

Food Committee: _____

Invitation/Communication Committee: _____

Family History: _____

Entertainment/Activities Committee: _____

Set-up Committee: _____

Clean-up Committee: _____

Registration/Welcoming Committee: _____

Decoration Committee: _____

Photography Committee: _____

Family Website Committee: _____

Worksheet for Family Union Arrangements

Date of Event:	Day of Week:	Time:
Name of the Site:		Estimated # of People:
Address for the Site:		Estimated # of Invitations:
Contact Person #1:		
Phone:	Pager:	e-mail:
Contact Person #2:		
Phone:	Pager:	E-mail:
Theme Colors:	Theme:	