

## Personal Health HERSTORY

When trying to understand and improve our present health status, reviewing our past health history can be very helpful. An important start is to write down the medical events, illnesses or injuries, as well as the health habits and significant life transitions that have had an impact on us. As we study women's health issues, we can gain a deeper understanding of how these issues have affected our lives. Writing our Herstory can help us identify the particular issues that have most affected us individually, and help us see patterns and causal relationships in our health.

In your Herstory, try to include all the health events important to you, from birth to the present. The topics listed on the back of this sheet should give you ideas of pertinent events. Expand with what is significant to you. Think about how these topics affected you, and particularly what things are affecting you now.

Before turning in your Herstory, reread it, and on a separate sheet of paper attached to your Herstory write a short list of issues that are affecting your health (physically, mentally or spiritually; from your past, your present, or concerns for the future.) Star the health concern(s) that you are most interested in addressing this semester in your Personal Health Concern Project. Health concerns that are active issues for you now that you would like to make improvements around are most ideal for this Project. Keep a copy of this list.

Your Herstory is a private paper that will be kept strictly confidential and returned. There will be time in class, however, for some optional sharing of our Herstories, or those parts of them you feel comfortable sharing. Sharing these personal stories helps us be aware of the diversity, as well as the similarities, in our experiences as women. By sharing them, we broaden our understanding and knowledge, and benefit from each other experiences. This is particularly helpful in expanding our understanding of women's health issues.

The following are some key issues in women's lives. Address these issues as they have affected your life, emphasizing and analyzing those issues most relevant and significant to you.

- \*Where were you born and how old are you?
- \*What kind of birth? were you breastfed? who raised you? do you have siblings? was there a divorce? did family structure change in other ways?
- \*What is your ethnic background? Is there a history of diseases that tend to run in families (heart disease, diabetes, cancer, etc.)
- \*What was your initial introduction to health care? What was your family's approach to health care? Use any ethnic or home remedies?  
Use private physician, clinic, dental care?
- \*Any major illnesses, injuries, hospitalizations, surgeries?
- \*What was puberty and menarche (1st menstrual period) like for you? How did you learn about menstruation and reproduction?
- \*What attitudes toward eating and exercise did you learn and how does this affect you now?
- \*How was and is your relationship with your self-image? Were issues such as weight, hair, shape, height very important to you, and how do you relate to them now?
- \*Are you sexually active (having sexual relations)? What is your sexual orientation (heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, questioning, etc.) and gender identity (female, male, transgender/transsexual)?
- \*Have you had any sexually transmitted infections? STI or HIV concerns?
- \*Have you used contraception and what have your experiences been?
- \*Have you been pregnant? What was it like for you?
- \*Have you or close friends had legal or illegal abortions? How was it; how did you/they feel?
- \*Have you had any children? What were your childbirth experiences?
- \*Have you had any connection to chronic disease, disability, or death that have affected you?
- \*Have you (or your family) had exposure to environmental toxins, such as pesticides, pollution, radiation, carcinogens, etc.
- \*Any mental health, alcohol or drug problems important to you?
- \*Any experiences with violence (rape, battering, incest or child abuse, harassment)? Have you been a witness to violence?
- \*How are you thinking and feeling about aging and menopause?

Add to this outline whatever seems important to you. Think about your strengths as well as challenges you have faced.

Remember to also write a short list of issues affecting your health today, starring the topics you are most interested in researching and working on this semester for your Personal Health Concern Project.