Huntington's Disease

Huntington's Disease is a rare hereditary disorder. It is characterized by irregular movements of the body, slurred speech, and the deterioration of mental functioning. Symptoms of the individual include alternating periods of excitement and depression. It is caused by a buildup of neurotransmitter fluids, which can cause schizophrenia. The first symptoms of the disease usually appear between the ages of 35 and 45, but much earlier and later occurrences are also known.

Since this disease occurs later in life, the only chance you would have of being diagnosed with it was if it was in your family's history. If one of the parents of a child has Huntington's Disease and the other does not, the child has a 50% chance of inheriting the disease. Once it is transmitted, it is certain to develop. The disease may progress for 10 to 20 years until the patient dies. No treatment yet exists for this disease. However, in 1983 a U.S. research team announced the discovery of an identifiable segment of DNA that can be used as an indicator of the presence of the gene causing the disease. In March 1993, the journal Cell announced that the Huntington's Disease Collaborative Research Group had discovered the gene behind the disease. This was a major breakthrough in the effort to understand and eventually work toward a treatment of the disorder.

Our group has decided to have the child. We have a steady income of $52,000 and are insured through our employers. Our counselor said that it was souly our decision to whether or not we wanted to have a child, but he warned us that the child could have a 50% chance of having the disease. However, he did point out that we were quite young to even be worried about starting a family. We have decided to have children, but possibly at a later time.