

Tips for Interviewing Relatives about Family Health History

1. Schedule a time in advance. This gives everyone a chance to prepare.
2. Prepare a list of questions beforehand and either share them with your relative, or let them know you are researching your family's health history.
3. Bring several notepads and pens to the interview. If you plan to make a recording, be sure to have a tape player, microphone, extra tapes and batteries.
4. Take good notes and make sure you record your name, the date, the place the interview is being conducted and the interviewee.
5. Start with a question or topic that you know will elicit a reply, such as a story you have heard her tell in the past.
6. Ask questions which encourage more than simple 'yes' or 'no' answers. Try to elicit facts, feelings, stories and descriptions.
7. Show interest. Take an active part in the dialogue without dominating it. Learn to be a creative listener.
8. Use props whenever possible. Old photographs, favorite old songs and treasured items may bring memories flooding back.
9. Don't push for answers. Your relative may feel uncomfortable speaking about illness or deceased relatives or may have other reasons for not wanting to share. Move on to something else.
10. Use your prepared questions as a guideline, but don't be afraid to let your relative go off on a tangent. They may have many things to say that you never thought to ask!
11. Be patient. It may seem like the relative is going off on an unrelated subject, but useful information may come out.
12. Don't interrupt or attempt to correct your relative; this can end an interview in a hurry!
13. When you are done, be sure to thank your relative for her time.