GOOD DECISIONS - Family History is Worth Knowing

By Christina A. Worthington

In the coming weeks, many of us will be spending increased time with relatives and loved ones. This is a perfect opportunity to think about researching, recording, and preserving your genealogy! Generations to come can draw from this strength and gain life-changing benefits. Genealogy can also be learned in a genetic fashion. Genetic ancestry testing, or genetic genealogy, is a way for people interested in family history to go beyond what they can learn from relatives or from historical documentation. In fact, here are a few specific gifts that can come from knowing your family’s history.

It helps you make better health decisions. From a medical standpoint, knowing your family’s health history can help identify a chance of having certain diseases. Conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers can be influenced by genetic factors. By noticing the health patterns of relatives, doctors can determine whether you or other family members have an increased risk of developing a particular condition.
Knowing this information is powerful, because it can help you make better choices regarding food, exercise, and other activities that could impact your health. It also allows you to take preventative steps, such as more frequent screenings and checkups to reduce your risk.

**It provides a sense of identity.** Learning about your ancestors, celebrating family traditions, and understanding where you came from can open your eyes to how special you are. This information enhances your sense of belonging, and it can be especially helpful for younger generations.

When children hear family stories, it creates a shared history and strengthens emotional bonds. They realize the definition of who they are is not something independent and spun from nowhere. It's embedded in a long, intergenerational family story. A family they will be connected to forever.

**It can make you feel resilient.** More than likely, your ancestors faced historical events and situations that seemed impossible to overcome. Learning about their stories and how they got through difficult times can provide the courage and strength you may need to overcome your own challenges. In essence, knowing your family history can build your resilience.

This idea has been reinforced by a study about the resilience of children. It was discovered that "the more children knew about their family's history, the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem, and the more successfully they believed their families functioned." Simply knowing their family history turned out to be the best single predictor of children's emotional health and happiness. What a priceless gift to pass along!

Here are some ways you can begin exploring your own story. These story ideas can be asked of your elders or shared with your children and grandchildren to provide a connection to the past.

- Where your grandparents grew up and what life was like during that time
- Your best memory from childhood
- Something important you learned as an adult
- Where their mom and dad went to high school
- Where and how their parents met
- A common health condition in the family and ways they can prevent it
- The story of their birth and any special details you remember about their childhood