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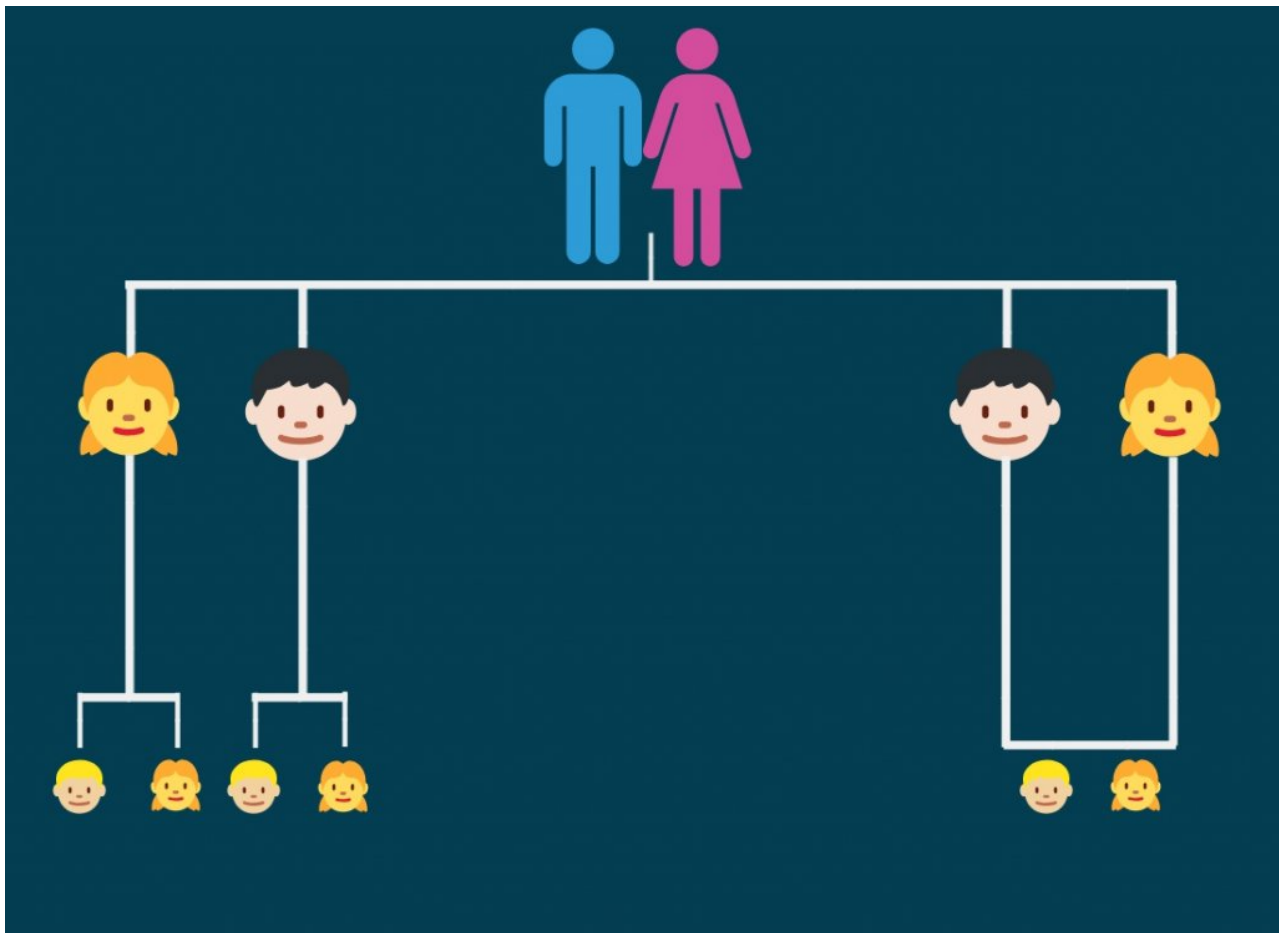
The Ultimate Beginner's Guide to Genealogy

 November 1, 2018

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The idea of doing genealogy research might make you cringe because you imagine yourself spending hours trapped in a library or a town hall as you dig through dusty books and tall shelves. You can now do much of the research that you like from home.

The internet made it easy for you to access the public records of town halls and community centers located thousands of miles away.



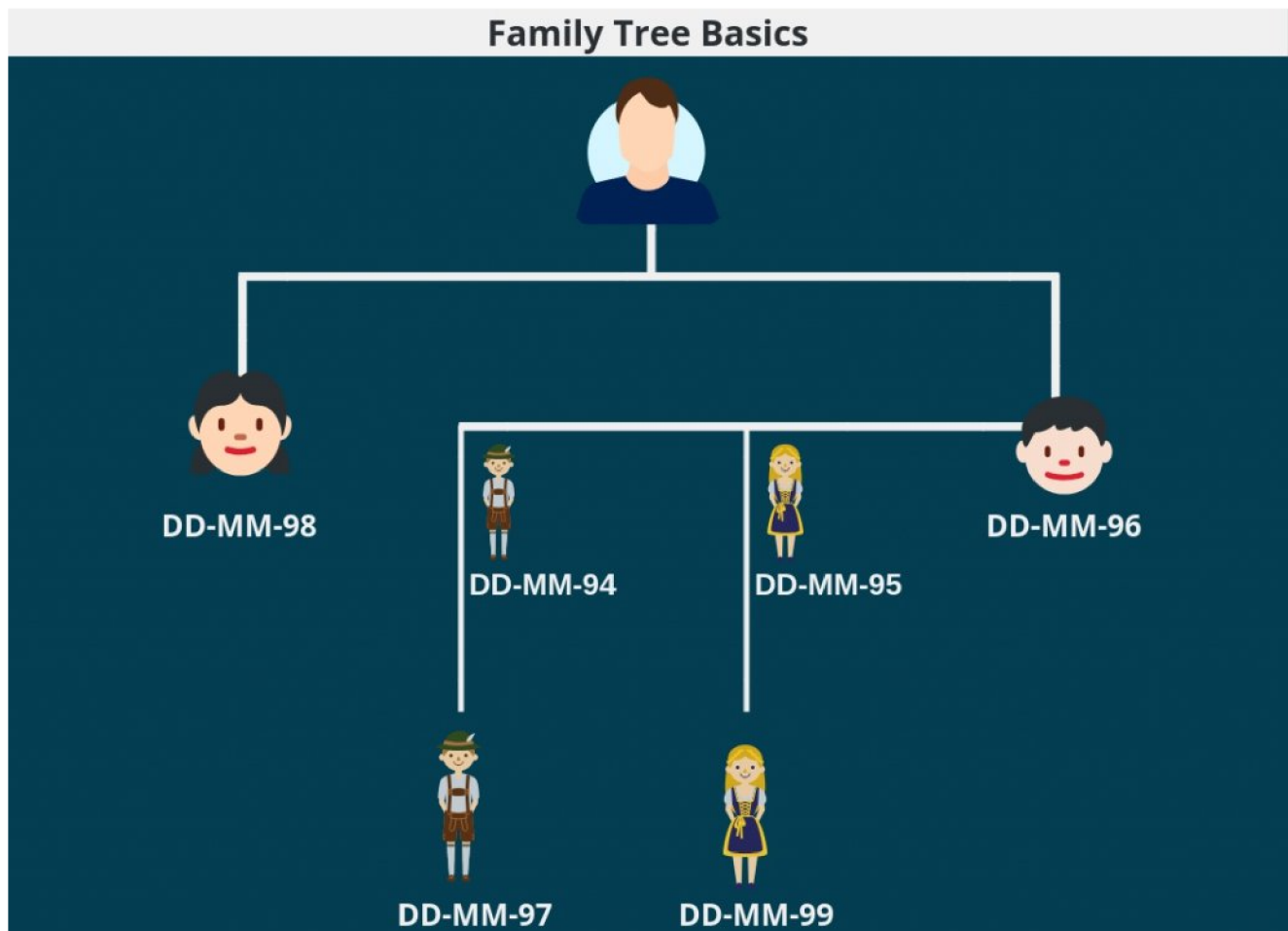
Those records will help you see where your family came from and whether any of those old legends and rumors passed down through the generations are actually true.

Some of the top records that you might use include directories that show you where people lived in the past and the census records that show you how many people lived at that specific address and both their ages and professions. While you can hire a private investigator to do some of this research for you or work with a researcher, you can also do the work yourself.

Our ultimate guide to genealogy research makes it easy for you to find exactly what you need in regards to your family. We'll go over the best ways to find the information that you need and the basics of home [DNA kits](#) too.

What Can Genealogy Tell You?

Do you have family members who swear you are descended from one of the early Native American tribes? A common thing that many families say is that they had a Cherokee princess somewhere in their family trees. That tribal group never had princesses though. You might hear other rumors and legends that you wonder about too such as having a connection to a famous person or a former president. Doing your own family tree can help you answer any of the questions that you have and show others exactly where your family comes from and anything unusual you found. You may discover that you descended from some of the first free slaves in the nation or that you really are related to a president.



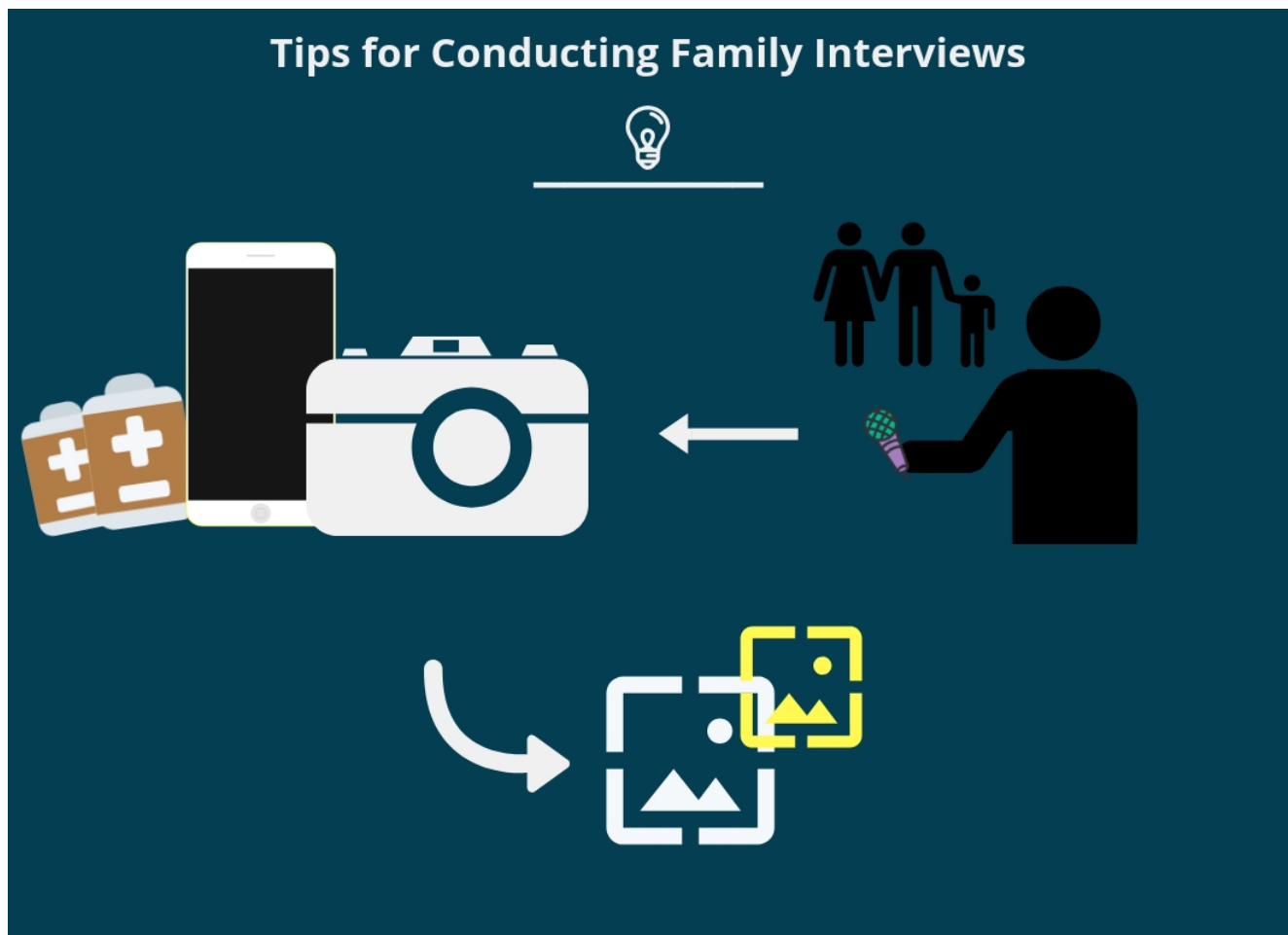
Genealogy work can also help you find the missing links within your family tree. During the Civil War, many families split because one side supported the North and the other rallied for the South. Your research can help you learn about family members you have in another part of the country that you never knew about.

While you do want to start with the oldest people in your family, you should also

use all the public records that you can find.

How to Interview Your Family

The older you get, the fewer resources you have available within your own family. There are only a handful of men who served during World War II who are still alive today. You may have an even harder time finding family members who lived through the Great Depression and other major historical events. When you conduct family interviews today, you can get a good starting point for your research. They can tell you about the stories they heard and any valid information that they have such as the birth name of your great-grandfather or where your great-great-grandmother was born.



Before conducting your interviews, you should decide how you want to record. Most cell phones have an app that will record others talking, but you can also download and use both free and paid apps of this type. You'll want to sit in a quiet

download and use both free and paid apps of this type. You'll want to sit in a quiet place without any distractions, which lets both you and your family member focus on the interview. It's also helpful to have a list of questions in hand before you start. This makes sure that you ask all the questions you came up with and that you get good answers. That list can also help you come up with new questions to ask other relatives.

Types of Public Records

The best records that are available are public records. These are the records that counties and cities maintain in relation to those who lived and worked in the city in the past. One of the top resources that researchers use today are those kept by the census. The United States takes a full census every 10 years and offers that information found online. You can go as far back as 1790 and see what changes occurred from one decade to the next. We'll go over some of the different types of public records that you can use before or after looking at our information on [Best DNA Kits](#).


United States Census

Many people who do research on their families start with the United States census, especially if they want to know some basic information. You can view the census data taken every 10 years for free, save for any records destroyed from the earlier reports. Doing a search by name lets you see anyone with that same name listed during that census. This allows you to see where the individual lived, his or her age and occupation and the names and ages of anyone else living in that same residence. You do need to know the age of the person at that time though because you'll often come across multiple people with the same or similar names.


Military Records


Do you constantly hear about how your grandfather lied about his age to serve


in World War II but have never seen evidence of his military service? You can actually check online to learn about his time. There are many websites that let you do a free search, which will show you whether an individual actually served. You'll also see when that person served and for which branch as well as his or her reason for discharge. There are also national archives that allow you to submit an information request and have copies of those records mailed right to you.




NAME: LT. JOHN MARREL

 **SERVED DATE:** 11-11-1988

 **AWARDED ON:** 19-5-1970

 **DISCHARGED ON:** 28-8-2000

 **BRANCH:** Swiss Army Campaign

Immigration Records

Even if your family swears that you lived in the country for years, you should still look for immigration records. These records list the names and ages of anyone who entered the country through legal channels. This is a great way to find information about a family that changed its name in later years. You may have a great-great-grandfather who decided to change the family name to look more American. Once you have your full and original last name, you can expand your research to include the records available in other countries.

Social Media Sites to Use as You Search





Google +



Facebook

Criminal Records

No one likes to think that they might have relatives who are criminals. If you avoid looking at criminal records though because you think they only show serious crimes such as murder, think again. Those records include any type of crime. Have you ever received a speeding ticket after a police officer pulled you over on the highway? If you search for your name, you'll view the court case associated with that ticket. Criminal records allow you to see any arrests and convictions attached to an individual's name. You'll often find dates of birth, full names, home addresses and sometimes even phone numbers listed.

Cemetery Databases

One of the last places you might think to look is in a cemetery database. These databases are great resources though, especially in smaller towns and rural communities. Let's say that your family came from a small town in a southern state such as Kentucky or North Carolina. You might find that the courthouse doesn't have nearly as many records as it should because of a fire or a flood. A cemetery database will feature a full listing of each person buried in a specific graveyard. You can see the name of the person and his or her birth and death dates. Some databases even include photos of tombstones.

Court Records

In the same way that you should look at criminal records, you should also look at court records. Most county courthouses have their records available online and allow you to search by name. When you search for a specific last name, you can view any records where someone with that last name was a defendant

or on the prosecution's side. Civil records include any lawsuits filed against a person such as a foreclosure filed against a home that individual owned and cases filed by the individual such as a bankruptcy. You can use those records to find personal contact information for the individual and the names of spouses or close relatives.



City Directories

Before the Yellow Book became a thing, many cities had their own directories. Most directories have a commercial section in the front that lists businesses and a residential section in the back that lists individuals who lived in the city. A new directory typically came out every year. Using one of these books will take more work than you might think though because many directories list addresses first and the person's name second. You can use one to see who lived in your family home. When you find family members listed, you can view their


occupations too.

Newspaper Records

Depending on your location, you may have the chance to search through newspaper records from the comfort of your own home. Many papers now have databases that let you enter any search terms or words you want to use to do a search for any articles that mention those words. Some papers offer this service but require that you pay a fee for the service or that you become a subscriber. You can also use Google and other search engines to look for information that comes from specific newspapers. If the internet doesn't give you what you need, you can always go to the local library and search through its newspaper archives.

Birth and Death Records

One thing you should seriously consider looking at is the birth and death records relating to one of your ancestors. Birth certificates are a great source of information because parents typically fill them out in the hospital and register them with the state. You can view the name of the child, the names of his or her birth parents, the location of the hospital and the name of the doctor. Death certificates contain quite a bit of information too and will show you the last known address and the cause of death as well as the occupation of the deceased.

Birth Certificate Samples			
	First name	Middle name	Last name
Name of child -	Rodgers	Paul	Morenson
Sex : Female	Date certified, If any :		
COLOR OR RACE			
Place of birth: Los Angeles	White		
Name of Father: Shawn Paul			
Date received by local registrar: JUNE 5, 1926			
 <p>This is to certify that the copy is true and correct statements are appearing on record of birth and above named child.</p>			

How to Get into Genealogy

The simple task of getting together to celebrate the holidays or have a family reunion is difficult for many families today. Between the time that you want to spend with your kids and with your spouse, you may not have as much time as you would like to invite the family over for dinner or to spend a weekend together in the middle of the summer. That doesn't mean you can't get started in the world of genealogy though. As long as you have a basic idea of what you want to find out and a good starting point, you can begin working on tracking your family's ancestry.



Before you begin, you should sit down and create a list that includes everything you know. This is when you'll want to write down the full names and dates of births for every member of your family. You can also keep track of siblings to find out more about your aunts and uncles. Depending on your age, you may want to start with your parents or your grandparents. It's much easier to find information about older people, especially those who are deceased than it is to find information about living family members.

How to do Genealogy Research for Free





Genealogy research used to start in the library. Now it's almost all on the internet

It can cost a few hundred dollars or more to hire a private investigator to track down a missing family member, but you can do the same research on your own for free. Even if you just want to know the country your family originally immigrated from or where your ancestors lived over the years, you can use the internet to start your research.

One of the easiest ways to find out about your family is with a search of your family name.

You can use Google or any other search engine for this step. When you enter your last name and hit search, you'll see all the results that the search engine thinks are most useful. Not only can you view pages that tell you the origin of your name and what it means, but you may see your family's coat of arms or crest too.

Though genealogical researchers all have their favorite sites that they use, many turn to Ancestry for help. This is one of the biggest ancestry websites on the web. Not only does it offer tons of useful information, but it also has its own DNA test kit. You can find out about the [Ancestry DNA Test Kit](#) before you buy too.

A nice feature of this site is that it lets you view census data. You can see where people with that last name lived during the 1840 census all the way through the

1920 census. This gives you an idea of how your family moved over the years. Ancestry offers historical documents, military records, birth and death records marriage certificates, immigration records and thousands of other documents online. You can sign up for a free account and view those records before becoming a full member. Other sites also offer DNA kits and family tree help.

If you know where someone in your family lived and roughly when that individual lived there, you can use your favorite search engine to access free public records. You'll want to enter the name of the city and courthouse in your search. This will bring up the website for the courthouse, which lets you see whether it has a free search available. Some public records databases, especially those in smaller towns, may limit when you can look through those records and how many you can view. It's important that you check for both civil and criminal records.

Where to Look for Online Resources

Though a home DNA test can reveal loads of information about your genetics and family history, you may want to look at some of the resources that help you learn more about your past first. Our section on the [23 and Me and Ancestry DNA Test Kits](#) can help you decide which ones of these popular tests are right for you. You can use your online and offline research with those test results to learn everything you ever wanted to know about your family.

Benefits of Free Genealogy Sites

- **Helps in tracing your ancestors**
- **Provides you with complete history and family data**
- **Data centres help you a lot in finding data history**
- **Various Genealogy site can help you in various**



The Family History Center is one of the best places to start your search. Owned and operated by the LDS Church, this center has its headquarters in Salt Lake City but offers smaller branches across the United States and in some foreign countries. You can actually use the center's website to find the location that is closest to you. The centers are completely free to use and give you access to millions of historical documents and records. Those working in the center can provide assistance as needed. It's worth attending one of the special events too. Family History Centers often offer workshops and classes for those doing genealogical research.

No matter where you live, your state should have its own historical society. The state historical society is one of the best places to view photos that might include images of your old family home or some of your relatives. If you live in an area that experienced a natural disaster over the years, you can often find quite a bit of information about family members who lived through that event or were displaced because of the disaster. Most states have their historical societies in major cities. You may want to check the historical societies in smaller towns and communities too.

If you come from a religious family, you may want to look at your church records too. Churches, especially those that are older, often have detailed records that go back generations. You can view marriage records that include details about anyone who married in the church. Most have baptism records too for any children baptized in the church. Those records can help you verify birth dates and the names of any children in your family. You can use baptism records to view the

names of the parents and grandparents of these children. Some records will make

names of the parents and grandparents of those children. Some records will make note of any siblings too.

There may come a time when you decide to travel outside of your hometown to do some research. If you have the chance, you should definitely check the courthouse in the town or country where your family once lived. Courthouses are a valuable source of information for genealogical researchers. You can view any wills or probates registered with the courthouse, which will list the names and dates that individuals died and who received their property. You can also see marriage and divorce records, birth and death certificates and adoption records. If you have an adopted family member, the courthouse is one of the first places to start your search for information.

DNA Testing Kits and What They Reveal

Whether your search for your family's history leads you to decide on the [MyHeritage DNA Testing Kit](#) or any other kit, you probably want to know what that kit is and what information it can tell you. The first thing you need to decide is what you want to test. You can choose between a mitochondrial DNA test that will only look at the genes that came from your mother's line or a YDNA test that will only look at the genes that came from your father's side. One thing to keep in mind about a YDNA test that only men can take it. It only looks at the genes that one man passes down through his family line. There is also something called an autosomal DNA test that will look at how the genes you have related to others around the world.

The first two types of tests are best for those who want to see where they came from and how their families changed over the years. These tests will show you down to a specific percentage how much of your genes come from different groups. You might learn that your family is primarily European or African. Most tests do not contain much information about Native American groups though. If

tests do not contain much information about Native American groups though. If you want to know if you are part of one specific tribe, you should take one of the [Best DNA Kits](#) designed for Native Americans.

Once you submit your test, the sample will go to a lab that processes the sample. You will later receive results that you can view online. Most kits require that you create an online account. The company will email you when your results are available and ask that you log in to view your results. You can view the information in an easy to follow layout that shows you the percentage of different genes found in your sample.

Some prefer the autosomal DNA tests because they want to find new family members and those they never knew or heard about before. With this type of test, you have the chance to put your results online and let others view them.

Top Home DNA Test Kits



Living **DNA**
YOUR ANCESTRY



23andMe®

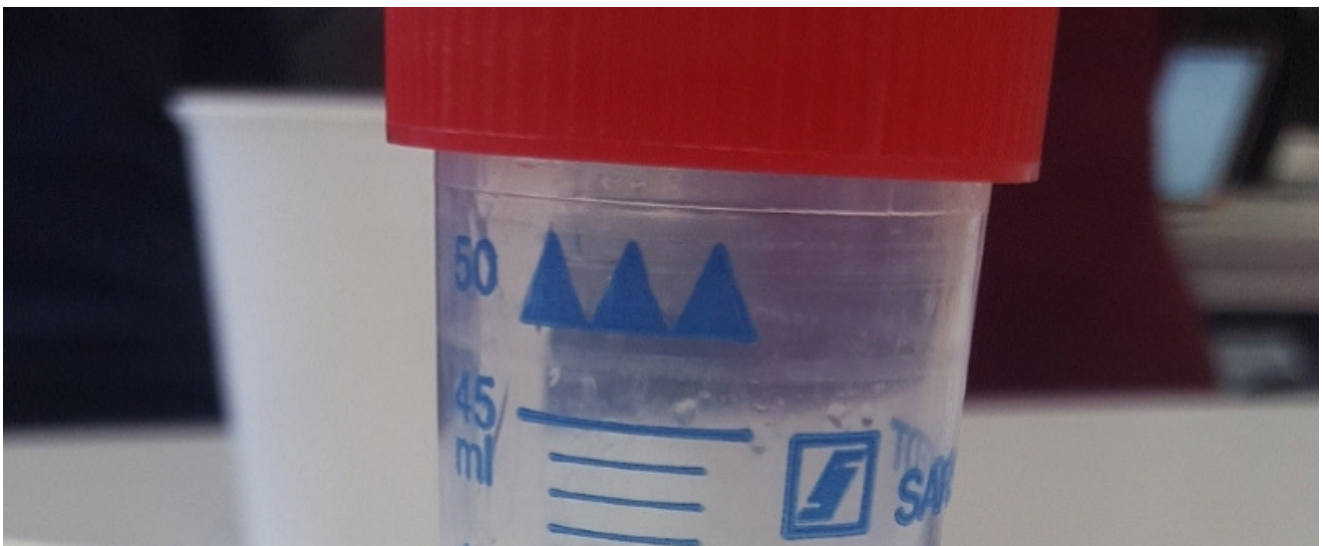


If your results match you to anyone else who submitted their own tests, you have the option of connecting with them and chatting online. Let's say that you have a relative who gave a baby up for adoption. You can use the site to find that adopted child and let that individual know about his or her family.

The two main pieces of information that home DNA test kits give you are where you came from and if you have a connection to any other user. Most companies divide the world into different regions and show you which percentage of your **genes** come from each region. You can share your personal information with any of your genetic matches and submit requests to connect with other matches. These tests can go much deeper than a simple genealogy search can.

How Does a DNA Test Work?

Both **23andMe**, **AncestryDNA**, and the kits that other companies make all work in the same way. If you ever took a paternity test or any other saliva test before, you should already know how this works. Before taking the test, you'll go online and create an account. Once you have your account, you can order a DNA kit and have it mailed to your home. It usually takes a few weeks for the test to arrive. Some drugstores also sell the testing kits over the counter, though those shops may not have the exact test that you want to take.





It's important that you open the kit and read through the instructions carefully to make sure that you understand how the test works. These kits require some type of saliva sample. **Ancestry DNA** asks that you spit into a small vial. You'll first remove the lid from the vial and then spit into it. The test requires that you add another liquid to the vial, which will keep your sample safe. Other tests ask that you remove a cotton swab from a sanitary package and rub it across the inside of your cheek. You'll then seal the swab in a second container. Both tests ask that you send your sample to the lab.

Many users find it helpful to take a sample first thing in the morning. You can sit for a few minutes and wait for the saliva to build up before you swab or spit. Anything that you eat or drink can damage the sample and cause it to degrade. This includes cigarettes that you smoke, coffee and soda that you drink and any foods you have. If you have a hard time producing enough saliva for the sample, you

may want to think about your favorite foods to activate your glands. Depending on the number of kits that need testing, it may take six or even eight weeks to get your full results.

How to Start a Family Tree Chart



While a DNA test can reveal a lot about your **chromosomes** and health, you really need to create a family tree to keep track of your research. The best way to start your family tree is with one of the programs that you can view below. These programs allow you to enter any information that you find and create links between individuals. Ancestry and other sites also give you the option of doing a free family tree once you become a member. You have the option to keep that tree private or to share it with others. If you decide to share it, you can view others who link back to your own tree.

The best place to start a family tree is with your own personal information. You'll want to put your full name on the bottom branch with your date of birth. If you are married, you can add the date of your marriage and link your name to your spouse's name with his or her date of birth. You can then add the names and dates of birth of your children below and the names and dates of birth and death of your parents to the branches above.

How to do a Family Tree for Free

As long as you have a printer and some paper at home, you can start working on your family tree for free and keep track of all the information you found via the [MyHeritage DNA Test](#) or any other home test. You'll find family tree worksheets that you can download and print off as needed. These worksheets are quite basic and have just a few lines where you'll write the name, date of birth and date of death if available of an individual. You can create different pages for each member of your family. Similar sheets are also available from libraries and centers with genealogy departments.

If you want an easy way to keep track of the information that you found, you might consider signing up for a free website or blog too. Both Blogger and WordPress give you the chance to make a free blog. One nice feature about these sites is that you can add tags to each of your posts.

Family Tree Apps



Those tracks can help you keep track of the information you found on both your mother's and your father's side and to identify information that you may want to double check later. You can open your site to the public and let distant family

double check later. You can open your site to the public and let distant family members contact you with any information that they have.

Genealogy Tips for Beginners

Cite Your Work

Anyone who ever wrote a paper for school before knows the importance of proper citations. When doing genealogical research, you might think that you don't need to cite your work because you don't plan on sharing it with others. Those citations can come in handy though if you find some confusing or contradictory information later. Let's say that one resource puts your grandfather's date of birth as 1921 and other sources say he was born in 1918. You can use your citations to find out what resources list a different birth date and compare the information to find out which one is actually true.

Use a Timeline Format

As you work on your family history, you might feel tempted to write down the basic facts and move on to the next person on your list. If you use a timeline format, you can learn more about each person you research. When you focus on your grandfather, create a timeline that shows where he lived and what he did over the years. You should record the times he served in the military, the date he married your grandmother, any jobs he held over the years that you find in the census and the date of his death. That timeline will give you an idea of how you relatives interacted with each other too.

Female Ancestors

A common issue that some genealogy enthusiasts encounter is that they cannot find information about a female ancestor. In past generations, women typically stayed with their husbands and had their phone numbers and

addresses listed under his name. Some states even banned women outright from owning property. You may want to check her maiden and married names in marriage databases to see if she remarried later in life. It's also helpful to check the census for her siblings' and children's names. Widowed women often lived with other family members instead of living on their own.

Start with One Site

When you use one database such as the National Archives, you might feel tempted to immediately use another site and compare the information that you found. Some users think that this will help them find discrepancies and that it will help them verify data, but this can actually leave you feeling more confused than you expected. It's important that you start with one site and use it as much as possible. You can keep track of your notes in a file on your computer or your notebook. Once you finish with that site, you can move onto another.

Set a Goal

The chances are good that you might find the sheer amount of information and number of resources available a little overwhelming. This is especially true if you have a common last name such as Smith or Adams. An easy way to keep yourself on track is with a goal system. You should set one specific goal in mind such as discovering when your family originally immigrated to the United States. All the work that you do should lead you towards that goal. You can set up other goals that you can work towards later to stay on track and focused.

Look for Conflicting Data

There is nothing worse than making a break in your family investigation and then later realizing that you were wrong. Let's say that your great-grandfather mysteriously went missing in the past. You might come across a record that makes it seem like he married another woman and started a new family, but when you look closer, you realize that this was a different man with the same name. Whenever you find conflicting data, you should write down a few notes

name. Whenever you find connecting data, you should write down a few notes about what you found and then go back over your research to determine which story is true. The wrong name, initial, birth date or social security number can wreak havoc on your research.

Start with the Facts

If you're new to the world of genealogical research, you might think that you should start with the oldest relative you can find. If you do this though, you risk getting confused and having issues finding out more about that person. It's usually better to start with a basic fact about someone you are familiar with or know such as your grandmother. You can use her birth certificate to find her parents' names and where they lived. Those facts will help you work backward as you find their birth and death certificates. You can keep working back as you focus on one person at a time.

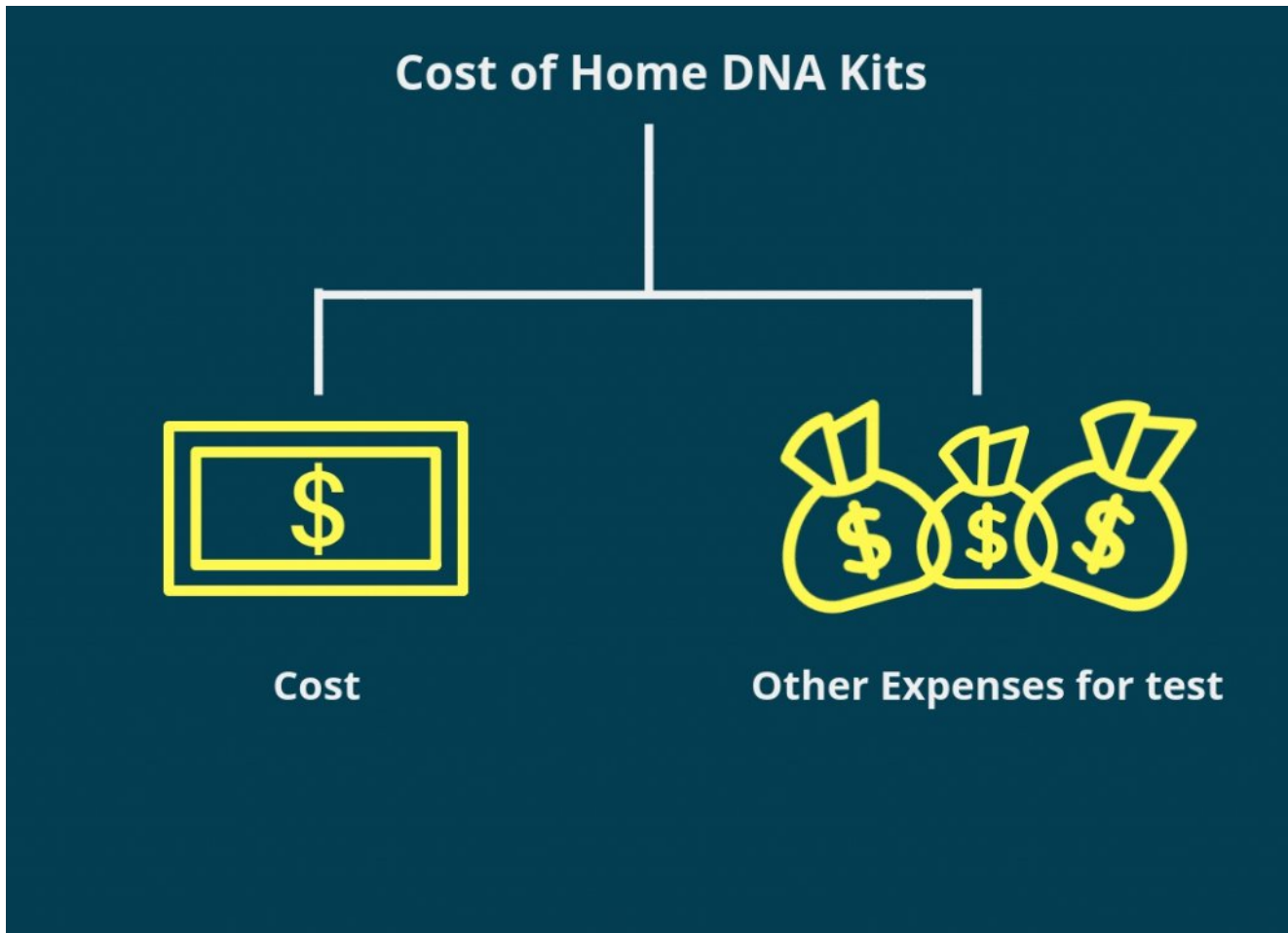
Move Beyond One Single Person

In the same way that you share chromosomes with your own siblings, your past relatives shared genes with their own siblings. When you have issues finding one person in your family, don't be afraid to expand your search and move beyond that single individual. It's a good idea to look for any close siblings, which can help you find that person. In addition to women living with their children and siblings, widowed men often moved in with their families, especially if they had medical problems. If you look for your grandfather's brother in the census records, you might find details about your grandfather too.

Use DNA Results

One of the best reasons to use a home DNA test is because it lets you connect with others who share similar genes with you. You should create an online account and tell the site that you have no problem sharing your information with anyone it detects as a match. Most sites let you send private messages to

each other, which gives each user some time to think and decide whether to respond. Keep in mind that you may find things you didn't want to know such as a sibling that your father had with another woman when married to your mother or a child that your mother gave up for adoption before you were born.



Set Reminders

The reason genealogical research can seem overwhelming is that you try to do too much work in one session. If you decide to track your family line back multiple generations in one sitting, you might get so bored and frustrated that you decide just to drop your research and let someone else in the family do it. Experts say that you should work in 15-minute increments of time. This gives you just enough time to check out one specific database or to find a few names in the public records without making you feel overwhelmed. You can set reminders to make sure that you work a few minutes every day on your family tree.

Use Message Boards and Forums

If you can afford to become a member of a paid genealogical research site, you should sign up for an account. This is especially true of sites that have message boards or forums. As a member, you can post your family tree and ask other members for advice on what you should do to add to that tree. This also lets others who share relatives with you comment on your tree and give you any information that they have. Those forums are also a good place to ask for help when you hit a dead end.

Check for Books

While you might think that no one cares about your family as much as you do, you might learn that someone else wrote and published a book about your family in the past. Even if you don't have a library card, you can search for your family name in your local library's catalog. Ohio and other states have a loan system that lets you borrow books from other libraries across the state. If you find a book about your family through the system, you can request that the library borrow it for you. These books may trace your family line before they came to America or after they settled in a specific area.

Follow Immigration and Settlement Patterns

A common reason why you might hit a dead end is that one of your ancestors moved rapidly over several years. You might find that the individual lived in North Carolina one year and then popped up in the next census living in Illinois. When you expand your search outside of the census records, you can trace the settlement pattern of that relative. You'll want to look at all the states in between those two, including Ohio and Pennsylvania. This can help you see where your ancestor lived and what he or she did between those two states.

Use Different Names

It's extremely important that you read through the search parameters before

searching through an online database. Some sites are very strict and will only provide results based on the exact terms that you enter. If you search for Bill Johnson because that's the name your grandfather went by, the site may not give you as many results because it doesn't look for William Johnson, which was his birth name. The best sites are those that will search for both full names and nicknames at the same time. You may want to search for individuals with a full name that changed slightly over the years too.

Check Neighboring States

Even if your family members lived in the same state their whole lives, you may not find the records you want in that state. That is because people often went to other states to get married or divorced. This was especially common in states with strict marriage and divorce laws. Those who lived in Washington often traveled to Idaho, while those who lived in California went to Nevada. When you expand your search of marriage and divorce records to neighboring states, you might find that information you couldn't find elsewhere.

Talk to Your Family

The best tips for beginners who want to do study genealogy is that they should talk to their families. Since you share genes with your loved ones, you should also share information. Not only can you tell them what you found on your search, but you can learn anything they might know or anything they found that you missed. This is also a good way to verify some of the facts that you found, especially if you found contradictory information. You might talk with your mother about why you found two birth dates listed for her father or why you found two marriage certificates for her mother. The more you talk and share with your family, the more information you will find.

Best Free Genealogy Sites and Resources





Start Your Research Today

Our ultimate beginner's guide to genealogy makes it easy for you to start your own family tree and build on all the research that you do. A family tree is something you can pass down to your children and their children to share your heritage and something you can share every time you get together with loved ones.

While doing research online and offline can help, you may want to have a DNA test done too, which lets you know if those family stories are true and where your family once lived. Our guide will help you get started on your research whenever you want.

4 thoughts on “The Ultimate Beginner’s Guide to Genealogy”



Chanel Waltman

April 17, 2019 at 9:31 pm | Reply

What’s up, I check your new stuff like every week. Your story-telling style is witty, keep up the good work!



Kushal DNATestingGuides

April 18, 2019 at 2:20 pm | Reply

Hi Chanel

Thank you for your kind words. We are happy that you like the style. We will keep up the good work.

Regards,
Kushal



Victor Mattison

July 18, 2019 at 2:28 am | Reply

Wow, this paragraph is fastidious, my younger sister is analyzing these things, thus I am going to inform her.



Kushal DNATestingGuides

July 23, 2019 at 6:57 pm | Reply

Thank you for your comment. We are glad that you found our post helpful.

Regards,
Kushal

Leave a Comment

Post Comment



Find out what at-home DNA test kits can do for you and why you need one. Get a DNA test done to find out everything you ever wanted to know about your heritage.

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