

Jenny's Story:

I work in the health field and know how important a family health history is. I talk to people about collecting a family health history all the time. But I had never stopped to take a look into my own past until I thought about starting my own family.

I sort of knew depression ran in my mom's family but didn't fully understand the implications of this until I talked with my mom and grandma who helped me piece together our family's history of depression and postpartum depression (or the "baby blues"). My grandma and mom have both struggled with depression off and on their whole lives. My grandma was even hospitalized for depression in her early 30s, during the time she was having children. My mom remembers going to visit her as a young girl on the weekends in the hospital. My mom had the "baby blues" after having my younger brother and then was on medication for depression in her 40s. My aunt has had the "baby blues" too and even my younger sister was treated for depression when she was in high school.

I was surprised to learn what I did about my family health history. It wasn't until I put it in a pedigree or family tree that I began to see the pattern of depression that ran from generation to generation. I remember looking at my family tree and thinking "Wow! Every other female relative has had depression and the "baby blues" and I'm next." One might think that learning this stuff is itself "depressing" but I feel empowered by knowing my family history. I learned that yes, this may be something I am at risk for and may have to deal with but asking for help is okay. Depression and other mental health problems are nothing to be ashamed of. Now as I anticipate the birth of my first child, I can share my family history with my doctor and watch for warning signs that I may be suffering from the "baby blues". My husband knows what to watch for as does my mom and grandma. Together as a family, we can support each other and get help early.