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Babies of younger mothers have twice the chance of living to 100

By FIONA MACRAE, Daily Mail

The secret of a long and healthy life could be as simple as your mother's age at the time of your birth.

Babies born to women under 25 are almost twice as likely to live to 100 as those born to older mothers, a study has shown.

The finding could have implications for the tens of thousands of British babies born to older mothers each year.

The trend for delaying parenthood means that almost half of the 720,000 babies born each year are born to mothers aged 30-plus.

The U.S. researchers analysed census data and information from genealogical records to reconstruct the family trees of almost 200 centenarians.

Comparing the centenarians' histories to those of their siblings revealed the link between young mothers and longevity.

Children born when their mothers were under 25 were almost twice as likely to live to their 100th birthday and beyond, a Chicago Actuarial Association conference heard.

Previous work by the University of Chicago husband and wife team Dr Leonid Gavrilov and Dr Natalia Gavrilova had shown that firstborn children live longer than their younger siblings.

Now it appears the two are linked, with older children living longer because their mothers are younger when they have them. However, the father's age has little effect on longevity.

The researchers say more work is needed to pin down why the mother's age is so important.

But it could be down to simple biology, with egg quality being best in younger women.

Dr Gavrilov said: "Maybe the eggs are different in their quality, and the best ones, the most vigorous, go first to fertilisation."

The answer could also lie in younger women being healthier than their older counterparts, who have had more time to pick-up conditions and infections that could affect their baby's health.

Dr Gavrilov said the finding "may have important social implications because many women postpone their childbearing to later ages because of career demands".

British doctors recently warned that women who put off having children until their 30s and 40s are "defying nature" and risking the heartbreak of infertility.

Writing in the British Medical Journal, consultant obstetrician Dr Susan Bewley warned that fertility problems increased with age and older mothers suffered more problems during pregnancy.

"Women want to 'have it all', but biology is unchanged," she said. "If women want room to manoeuvre, they are unwise to wait until their 30s."

However, advances in diet and healthcare mean that the children of today still have a better chance of living to 100 than their ancestors did.

Today's Thirtysomethings are said to have a one in eight chance of living to be 100, while thousands could live to 110 or older.

Government experts estimate that further improvements in medicine and lifestyle will lead to Britain boasting a million centenarians by 2074.

Other experts believe 100 could become the average age of death as soon as 2050.

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