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Born in the Fall? You May See 100



The husband and wife scientific team of Dr. Leonid Gavrilov and Dr. Natalia Gavrilova see an association between longevity and month of birth.

There's something to say about being a "fall guy" (or gal) and it's something positive. That is, if you were born during autumn, you stand a better chance of reaching the century mark than do folks born during other times of the year, note researchers supported by the National Institute on Aging.

Currently, your chances of placing 100 candles on your birthday cake, while still slight, are better than ever before. Figures from the U.S. Census Bureau show that the number of centenarians has doubled in the past 20 years. In the meantime, according to the 2010 census, more than 53,000 men and women were age 100 or older, nearly a 6 percent increase from the year 2000.

For the current investigation, scientists examined the relationship between the month of birth and the odds of surviving to 100 by delving into the records of more than 1,500 men and women born between 1880 and 1895 and comparing them to the birth records of their shorter-lived

siblings raised in the same household. Similar spousal effects were also looked at.

"What we came away with from our research is that if you were born during a fall month, this had a very positive impact on survival to advanced age—in other words, how long you would live," explained Dr. Leonid Gavrilov, a gerontologist with the Center on Aging at the University of Chicago. "For example, we found that the odds of becoming a centenarian were about 40 percent higher for persons born in September, October or November than for someone born in March."

Gavrilov conducted the study along with his wife Dr. Natalia Gavrilova of the same Chicago institution. Results were published in a recent issue of the *Journal of Aging Research*.

The noteworthy findings notwithstanding, the obvious question is "Why did babies born in autumn outlive others?" While the findings are robust, the reasons are not as obvious. Gavrilov suggested that a number of factors may be responsible.

"Maternal or child nutrition, pediatric infections, climate/sun exposures and other seasonal impacts not yet identified could explain in part or whole the lifespan differentials," he said, adding that "it may well be that seasonal infections in early life create long-lasting damage to human health. It's an interesting theory that we hope to follow up on," Gavrilov added.

Besides the practical aspects of their findings, the scientists note that the results may be useful for public health policymakers who argue that further investments in child health may have not only immediate positive consequences, but also critical, long-lasting implications for the health of future seniors. In addition, the information may be useful for researchers in their attempts to understand the mechanisms of human longevity.

A more recent protocol undertaken by the Chicago scientists follows similar avenues of research on birth and longevity. In particular, the Gavrilov team has shown that individuals born to younger mothers (25 years old or less) have about an 80 percent increased likelihood of living to 100 years of age, compared to their siblings born to older mothers.

For more on their research, visit www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3236478/.—Jan Ehrman