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Life too short, girl? Blame the old man

By Alexandra
Smith
March 2, 2004

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Dr Natalia Gavrilova has shown daughters born to older fathers are likely to die earlier.

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Searching for the secret to a long life, girls? Forget clean living, a positive outlook and good luck. Just hope your father didn't delay parenthood. You can blame childbirth, a disadvantaged upbringing or your lifestyle, but a woman's life span may be shortened before she is even born.

Research from the University of Chicago's Centre on Ageing shows that daughters born to fathers in their late 40s or older live, on average, three years less than other women, yet their brothers are not affected. It

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suggests that men too are racing a biological clock when it comes to having children.

Women know the dangers of delaying motherhood, but several genetic conditions have now also been linked to older fathers, including achondroplasia dwarfism, Apert syndrome and schizophrenia.

But the answer is not to leap into fatherhood early in life - daughters born to fathers aged under 25 also have a shortened life span, said the centre's research associate, Natalia Gavrilova.

Dr Gavrilova, who will present her research to a longevity conference in Sydney this weekend, said the discovery posed a problem for sperm donors. "The age constraints for donors of sperm cells used for in vitro fertilisation should be carefully revised," she said.

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