

Women's expected longevity linked to age at birth of last child

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No one knows for sure how long they will live. A new study, however, suggests that leukocyte telomere length may offer some key insights into a woman's longevity and further demonstrates how maternal age at birth of last child affects telomere length and long-term health. Study results are published online today in *Menopause*, the journal of The North American Menopause Society (NAMS).

This is not the first time that the length of a woman's leukocyte telomeres has been linked with her projected lifespan. Telomeres are

repeating DNA-protein complexes that protect the ends of chromosomes and have proven to be critical for maintaining genomic stability. Previous studies have suggested a link between telomere length and various chronic conditions such as [cardiovascular disease](#), type 2 diabetes, some neurologic conditions, and various cancers.

A smaller study previously suggested that maternal age at the birth of a woman's last child affected telomere length. This new, larger-scale study included more than 1,200 perimenopausal and postmenopausal women of various ethnicities and backgrounds from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. In addition, unlike previous studies, this study took into consideration sociodemographic factors related to childbearing patterns and health decisions.

The study confirmed that maternal age at last birth is positively associated with telomere length, meaning that women who delivered their last child later in life were likely to have longer telomeres, a biomarker of long-term health and longevity. This finding was restricted to women with one or two [live births](#) or who had used [oral contraceptives](#).

Results are published in the article "Maternal age at last birth and leukocyte telomere length in a nationally representative population of perimenopausal and postmenopausal women."

"More research is needed to determine whether older [maternal age](#) at last birth causes telomeres to lengthen or whether telomere length serves as a proxy for general health and corresponds with a woman's ability to have a child at a later age," says Dr. Stephanie Faubion, NAMS medical director.

Provided by The North American Menopause Society

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