How early you lose your virginity is affected by your genes, scientists claim

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Britain's teens are some of the youngest in the world to lose their virginity, the research says

The age at which you lose your [virginity](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/virginity) is influenced by your genes, scientists say.

Researchers found that nature plays a significant role has a when it comes to a person's first sexual experience.

Although social and family factors are most important, the Cambridge University study found DNA is also crucial factor in determining early sexual behaviour.

Britain's teens are some of the youngest in the world to lose their virginity, with 16 the average age.

In the 1950s the average age for losing your virginity was 21 and by 1980 it had already decreased to 17. The global average is 17.3 years.

Iceland has the youngest figure, with the average age of losing virginity 15.6 years old.

In countries such as India, Malaysia and Vietnam, people are considerably older when they lose their virginity with the average age between 19 and 20.

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More than 380,000 people took part in the study which found DNA differences played a role in when people started puberty, lost their virginity and had a family.

One of the mutations that prompted early sexual intercourse has also been linked to risk-taking behaviours.

Researchers analysed the genomes of 59,357 men and 66,310 women, aged 40 to 69, from the UK Biobank health study and identified 38 variants associated with age at first sexual intercourse.

They then replicated the findings in 241,910 over 45s from Iceland and 20,187 women from the US.

Epidemiologist Dr John Perry said: "While social and cultural factors are clearly relevant we show age at first sexual intercourse is also influenced by genes which act on the timing of childhood physical maturity and by genes which contribute to our natural differences in personality types.

"One example is a genetic variant in CADM2 - a gene that controls brain cell connections and brain activity - which we found was associated with a greater likelihood of having a risk-taking personality and with an earlier age at first sexual intercourse and higher life time number of children."

Previous research has shown early loss of virginity is associated with adverse educational achievements, physical health and mental well-being.

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Several of the gene variants described in the latest study published in Nature Genetics were located in or near genes previously implicated in brain development and neural connections.

The analysis also uncovered associations with a range of reproductive behaviours such as age at first birth and number of children.

The timing of puberty has decreased from an average age of 18 in 1880 to 12.5 in 1980.

In earlier studies by the same team it was found premature puberty is linked to increased long-term risks for diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and some cancers.

The researchers hope taking account of the timing of puberty and personality type could lead to more targeted and effective approaches to health care.