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Healthy living ‘could add an extra 5 years to life’

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PEOPLE genetically predisposed to a shorter life could live around five years longer if they follow a healthy lifestyle, scientists have discovered.

In the first study of its kind, experts explored how the odds of survival can be improved through exercise, a healthy diet, getting enough sleep and not smoking, despite the huge influence of genetics. The study involved 353,742 people from the UK Biobank and showed that those with a high genetic risk of a shorter life have a 21% increased risk of early death compared with those with a low genetic risk, regardless of their lifestyle. Meanwhile, people with unhealthy lifestyles have a 78% increased chance of early death, regardless of their genetic risk.

The study also found that having both an unhealthy lifestyle and shorter lifespan genes more than doubled the risk of early death compared with people with luckier genes and healthy lifestyles.

But researchers found that people did appear to have a degree of control over what happened. Their findings showed that the genetic risk of a shorter lifespan or premature death might be offset by a favourable lifestyle by around 62%.

They said: “Participants with high genetic risk could prolong approximately 5.22 years of life expectancy at age 40 with a favourable lifestyle.”

The “optimal lifestyle combination” for a longer life was found to be “never smoking, regular physical activity, adequate sleep duration, and healthy diet.” The study in the journal followed people for 13 years.