



Blood tie to long living for women

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AN AMERICAN expert on longevity believes menstruation may play a part in why women are almost six times as likely to live to 100 than men.

To test his theory, Thomas Perls, director of the New England Centenarian Study, donates more than half a litre of blood every two months to mimic menstruation and, he hopes, slow the ageing process.

Dr Perls told the International Healthy Ageing and Longevity Conference in Brisbane yesterday more than 85 per cent of centenarians were women.

"Women are clearly the winners of the longevity marathon," he said.

Some scientists believe oestrogen plays a protective role in women, but Dr Perls said another theory was that menstruation, which can cause iron deficiency over a large part of a woman's life, was a factor.

"Iron is a critical factor in our cell's ability to produce those nasty molecules called free rad-

icals that play an important role in ageing," Dr Perls, an assistant professor of medicine at Boston University, said outside the conference. "It may be as simple as having less iron in your body."

This slows ageing and the susceptibility to age-related diseases in which free radicals play a role.

"I menstruate, but only every eight weeks. I do that by donating a pint of blood to the hospital," he said. "A little bit of that is altruism, but I'm also actually seriously trying to make myself iron deficient."

Dr Perls, who also avoids eating red meat, said donating blood was still being studied to see whether it had any effect on the ageing process in men.

Almost all men who reach 100 are married, but about one in five centenarian women had never been brides, Dr Perls said.

"An unusual proportion of the centenarian women — about 17 per cent — were never married compared to other women born around the same time," he said. **AAP**