

Interbreeding with Neanderthals, Denisovans gave us an evolutionary boost, study says

When *Homo sapiens* left Africa and encountered the *Homo neanderthalensis* in Europe, the two ancient hominins did the obvious thing and had sex with one another, exchanging life-saving [genetic adaption](#)s. That genetic exchange allowed human-hybrid children to skip the thousands of years of natural selection Neanderthals experienced in Europe, and inherit virus-fighting and life-saving genes fast.

This genetic boon occurred some 100,000 years ago, but [Neanderthal](#) genes — along with the genes from another species of ancient human, the [Denisovans](#) — continue to influence our health today.

Now, scientists say this influence may be more expansive than they previously thought. In fact, ancient humans' genetic exchange could be one of the major causes of adaptive evolution in humans, according to a new [study](#).

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It's previously been shown that the Denisovan [gene EPAS1](#) likely helps Tibetans live in high-altitude places, and that some Neanderthal variants are associated with behavioral traits, including mood disorders and an inclination towards [cigarettes](#).

The new study found that, in European populations, Neanderthal genes are also linked to metabolism, iron- and oxygen-binding in red blood cells and muscles, as well as olfactory receptors.

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