

# Catch Up

A newsletter for participants in the 45 and Up Study



## The secrets of healthy ageing

### How do you give yourself the best chance of staying healthy into your sixties and beyond?

The basic ingredients – a good diet and regular exercise – may be no great mystery. But thanks to the information you've shared with the 45 and Up Study, researchers and policy makers are finding out more about what people can do to increase their odds of living healthily into their later years.

One research project tracked the health of 50,000 45 and Up Study participants who were initially free of major disease. After nine years, around half had developed a chronic condition such as heart disease or diabetes, while the other half remained disease-free.

What made the difference? Researchers found consumption of at least three daily servings of fruit and vegetables was common

in participants who remained disease-free. Keeping the weight off, not smoking, cutting back on alcohol and getting physically active were also key to ageing healthily.

Another intriguing study showed that a healthy diet also benefits our memory. Looking at 139,000 45 and Up Study participants, researchers found eating lots of fruit and vegetables lowered the odds of memory loss. A diet rich in protein (meat, milk and especially fish) was also linked to better memory.

These and other findings show why your contribution to the 45 and Up Study is so important. We are connecting decision makers with evidence that can improve healthcare outcomes and help Australians to live longer, healthier lives.

## Thank you!

Welcome to the newsletter for participants in the 45 and Up Study. You are one of the many Australians who have generously shared their health experiences with us. With your help, the 45 and Up Study has grown into Australia's largest ongoing study into healthy ageing:



**Thank you for helping to improve the future health of all Australians!**



## What you've told us about mental health

Looking after our mental health is important as we age, but could it be as simple as going out for a walk?

According to evidence from the 45 and Up Study, green space and exercise make a bigger difference to our minds than we think.

Researchers from the University of Wollongong found that adults with at least 30% of their neighbourhood covered in tree canopy had 31% lower odds of developing psychological distress, such as anxiety or depression. Their general health was likely to be better, too.

Big patches of grass like an oval or field didn't have the same effect: it seems the trees themselves have uniquely restorative qualities.

So, if you want to feel better, look up and enjoy the scenery.

Adding exercise into the mix can also do amazing things for the brain. In another project using 45 and Up Study data, NSW researchers found a link between regular exercise and better mental health in men over the age of 65.

Participants who did no exercise were the most likely to experience high psychological distress. Researchers even discovered a "dose-related response" – in other words, the more you exercise, the less likely you are to suffer psychological distress.

The take-home is if you want to keep poor mental health at bay, an exercise routine is a good start, even as you hit your mid-sixties and beyond.

## Message from our Chief Investigator

It's been a busy year for the 45 and Up Study, with lots of exciting discoveries about how Australians age.



Of course, we couldn't do any of this without you! Since 2006, the 45 and Up Study has grown into one of the world's largest ongoing studies, and the information you provide tells us new and intriguing things about life after 45. Like how small adjustments to diet and physical activity can improve our chances of living longer (see cover story).

There is much more to learn, so around every five years you'll get a new survey from us. It's important for us to hear back from you, as this provides a crucial long-term picture of health and disease in Australia.

If it ever becomes difficult for you to participate, please just let us know. We're building new ways to connect online, and we're always keen to hear how you're finding the Study experience.

Once again, thank you – we are truly grateful for your support and involvement in the 45 and Up Study.

**Dr Martin McNamara**  
Chief Investigator  
45 and Up Study

### How the 45 and Up Study is making an impact



Over 370 research articles published to date



Findings used by leading voices like the World Health Organisation



Evidence used by the Australian Government



Research projects span 90 organisations in 18 countries

## Why I signed up to the Study

When Merryl Humphreys (pictured) got a letter asking her if she'd like to be involved in the 45 and Up Study, she was immediately intrigued.

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"It sounded really interesting. I thought it would be great to see what you can learn over time from a huge group of people!"

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Merryl, who is 63 and lives on the Central Coast just north of Sydney, says she's kept up her interest in the Study over the years.

"I always look at the newsletters that are sent to me to hear about what's happening with the Study. I like to click through the links and look at the research based on information from the Study."

After a Sydney-based career in IT, Merryl worked part-time in retail until

very recently. Sadly, she was among the many thousands of Australians who found themselves out of work due to the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent economic downturn.

She doesn't think too much about her health, although like most people her age she finds herself putting on weight from time to time, which she combats with regular trips to the gym and healthy eating.

"Generally speaking, my health is pretty good. But I do have a curvature of the spine and since I've got older it's affected me more. I get lower back pain when I don't exercise, so it's very important for me to keep up with the gym and keep walking and just generally be more active."

Merryl says another motivation for participating in the 45 and Up Study was that it was something she could do for the greater good.



"That was very appealing. I'm always keen to do what I can to help in the community, and now volunteer one day a week at a local op shop."



Join our community of participants on Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/45andUpStudy](https://www.facebook.com/45andUpStudy)

## COVID-19 and the 45 and Up Study



This year has not turned out the way we expected. The COVID-19 pandemic has claimed the lives of thousands across the globe and profoundly changed our way of life. Researchers are scrambling to understand this new disease and predict its effects on our community and health system.

The 45 and Up Study is very much a part of this global research effort. Our upcoming survey of participants will include a

focus on COVID-19, and the information we collect will be linked to data from hospitals, emergency rooms and other major health resources. We hope to gain important insights into who is most strongly affected by the disease, who will require more intensive care, the mental health impact of the disease and how we can better respond to public health crises in the future.

The Study could also drive research into genetic risk factors for more severe

responses to the virus, thanks to blood specimens we've collected from participants, over 1,000 of which have already undergone complete genomic sequencing.

We are already teaming up with other research institutes to unlock the potential of the Study for a better understanding of this devastating pandemic and look forward to working closely with researchers from across the world who want to use our data.





## Our next research priorities

Over the coming year, many more research projects using the 45 and Up Study will see the light of day. One we're particularly excited about is looking into the risk factors for dementia.

Researchers are currently using data from the 45 and Up Study to pinpoint which lifestyle, health and environmental factors contribute to the onset of dementia, and what we can do to potentially delay or even prevent this debilitating condition.

Dementia is the second leading cause of death in Australia, and it's hoped that findings from the research project will help lead to new strategies for prevention. Information about this important piece of work will be available on our website over the coming year.

Another project that's underway is a research partnership with Cancer Council NSW, investigating out-of-pocket healthcare costs for people affected by cancer.

As part of this research, we've included some extra questions in this year's survey about medical costs. Your answers will help researchers get a clearer understanding of how much Australian cancer patients are paying for things like treatment, medication, equipment and travel.

These findings will support policy makers as they develop better services for Australians with cancer. As we continue with another year of invaluable health research, thank you for your contribution to the 45 and Up Study.

## Look out for your next survey

Around every five years we will send you a new questionnaire to follow your health and lifestyle details over time. Many of you will receive a questionnaire in 2020 that includes new questions about medical expenses and wellbeing. You can fill in your questionnaire online or by post. Simply contact us to update your details.

## Update your details

Please let us know if your contact details change so we can continue creating a dynamic and accurate picture of how Australia is ageing. Staying in touch also means we can keep you up to date on the Study's progress. You can update your details in a number of ways:



### Call our Infoline

1300 45 11 45



### Email us

45andUp@saxinstitute.org.au



### Update online

[www.saxinstitute.org.au/participants](http://www.saxinstitute.org.au/participants)



### Write to us

The 45 and Up Study  
GPO Box 5289  
Sydney NSW 2001

## About the Sax Institute

The Sax Institute is an independent, not-for-profit organisation and a national leader in driving the use of research evidence in policies and programs to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians.

**Catch»Up**

45 and Up Study partners:

