

Welcome to 45&Update

Thank you for your continuing participation in the 45 and Up Study. More than 265,000 people aged 45 and over are now participating in the Study. This is more than 10% of men and women of this age group in NSW and makes the Study the largest population based health study in the Southern Hemisphere. Thank you!

This newsletter contains a snapshot of some of the research using the information you have provided, which is already making an important contribution to improving the health and wellbeing of the Australian population. We profile some of the researchers who are using your data and introduce you to some other people who have joined the Study. We also tell you about research projects you may be invited to join. Importantly, we include information on our first five-year follow up survey (see right), which will be mailed midway through 2011 to those who joined the Study in 2006.

If you would like more information or have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us or visit our website at: www.45andUp.org.au.

First five year follow up survey

Everyone who joined the Study gave consent for us to contact them again in five years' time to ask for more information about their health and lifestyle. For the 45,000 people who joined the Study in 2006, it is already that time! If you are one of these early participants, please look out for our questionnaire. This will be mailed to you midway through 2011 and we would be very grateful if you could complete and return it to us.

Why I signed up

Why did you say yes to the Study?

I was diagnosed with testicular cancer and given two options: chemo and radiation with a 50% chance of survival; or a clinical trial involving invasive and dangerous radical surgery and 98% survival. I took the latter. Even after that choice, I've faced many other health issues and it's been a struggle navigating the medical maze. I hope by volunteering for trials and sharing my information I can help make the road I travelled easier for those coming up behind.

Is a healthy lifestyle important?

It's always been on my radar. I was a landscaper for 25 years and you can't move concrete blocks and expect your body to work if you don't take care of it. I think my cancer is a combination of a bunch of things: diet, locality, genetics – my specialist thinks there's something in the fact that two thirds of my family have had cancer. Maybe I'm just more prone to it.

Do you have concerns about Australia's health care system?

It frustrates me that I have a personal GP in my home town but I can't see him when I need to. It's annoying watching the system jamming up, and it's not going to get easier.

What do you think should be done?

More money should be spent on preventative medicine. Australia is a great country; we've come up with amazing inventions. My sister's daughter lost her hearing as a baby but when the bionic ear was developed she heard for the first time in 16 years purely because we're willing to experiment and find new ways of doing things. I support research agencies because someone has to come up with an answer sooner or later. I think the 45 and Up Study will help answer important questions about cancer.



Gary Johnson, 45 and Up Study participant

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Professor
Emily Banks



LIKE TO HELP PROMOTE the 45 and Up Study? Tell us your story, we'd love to hear from you. Please call our Infoline 1300 45 11 45 or email us: 45andUp@saxinstitute.org.au



5 Quick Questions

Dr Bette Liu

One project using data from participants in the 45 and Up Study has found that breastfeeding for just a few months can lead to a lasting reduction in risk



of type 2 diabetes. Dr Bette Liu, a former Research Fellow at University of Western Sydney, answers our questions about this research. Her answers may help someone you know.

1. What do your findings add to what we already know about breastfeeding and type 2 diabetes?

We found that having children appears to increase a woman's chances of developing diabetes, but breastfeeding can reduce this risk to the same level as a woman who has never had children.

2. So breastfeeding benefits the mother as well as the baby?

That's right. Babies benefit from breast milk and, although there are other things you can do to prevent diabetes, like weight control and being active, we believe breastfeeding is something women can also do, for a short period of time, which leads to a lifetime benefit.

3. Why does breastfeeding affect later diabetes risk?

This study didn't look at why, but it could be because hormonal changes associated with breastfeeding alter the way a woman's body handles blood sugar after pregnancy.

4. What can family and friends who are considering breastfeeding take from your findings?

A lot of women find it hard to balance breastfeeding, work and other priorities, but if they can manage to do this, even for a few months, it may help protect them in the long term.

5. How will your findings be used to benefit the community?

As there are so many health benefits from breastfeeding for both mother and child we need to think about making it as easy and socially acceptable as possible for the younger generation of women to breastfeed.

Ill health doesn't have to mean early retirement

Information given by participants in the 45 and Up Study is improving our understanding of what leads to early retirement and the best ways to keep skilled people in the workforce.



Gillian Hutchinson, 45 and Up Study participant

When Gillian Hutchinson's arthritis became too painful and she announced her retirement, no one batted an eyelid.

The high school where she was a music teacher accepted her resignation without question and her family prepared for the inevitable.

Gillian says: "My arthritis came on slowly but when I couldn't stretch my fingers for an octave or massage shampoo into my scalp I knew there was no way I could continue teaching.

"That's how it was in 1998" says Gillian when "we thought it was just a matter of time before I'd be sitting in a wheelchair with gnarled fingers."

According to Dr Sabrina Pit from the University of Sydney, retirement age has a big impact on individual wellbeing. And early retirement can also have an adverse impact on the productivity of the workforce.

The decision about when to retire is complex and incorporates social, economic and health related factors.

Understanding these issues is at the heart of Dr Pit's research, which used data provided by participants in the 45 and Up Study.

In her research Dr Pit looked at health problems people nominated as their reasons for early retirement.

Dr Pit and her colleagues reviewed questionnaires from 1,993 male and 3,160 female retirees aged 45-64 and compared health factors in people who reported retiring due to ill health with those who retired for other reasons.

The study found cancer, thrombosis, depression and arthritis were the most common conditions underlying health related retirement in women, while stroke, cancer, osteoarthritis, depression, anxiety and heart disease were most common in men.

Treatment of these conditions and providing flexible work options would not only deliver immediate health gains but would increase productivity because people remain in the workforce longer.

Treatment and flexible work options could have helped Gillian, who recovered full use of her hands after resting for a year.

Gillian says "I enrolled in a special course for arthritis sufferers and rekindled my love of table tennis after discovering the sport has a positive impact on arthritis (the movement keeps the blood circulating around the joints).

Today I work up to nine days a month as volunteer manager at the Sydney University Gift Shop, and I'm training three times a week to defend my NSW over 75s Table Tennis Champion title.

But I miss my job a lot; I built up friendships with other musicians that I'll never replace".

If you would like to read more about these studies go to:
www.45andUp.org.au

Behind the scenes: lifting the lid on genes, lifestyle and environment

Recently we invited a small group of participants in the 45 and Up Study to give us a blood sample. Over time, we are hoping we can ask all our participants to do the same. In doing this, we plan to build a complete picture of disease risk and reveal why one person gets sick and the next person doesn't. We asked the Scientific Director of the 45 and Up Study, Professor Emily Banks, to explain more about this.

What do you hope to find out through this work?

We need to know the role of genetics in a person's risk of disease. If you ask people generally what causes cancer one of the first things they'll say is 'genes'. But the big changes in population health can't be explained by genetic factors alone. For example, people's genes don't change markedly over time and yet the population is getting fatter and taller and we're living longer and heart disease is decreasing. But if we build a picture of the interplay of biological, environmental and lifestyle factors in causing disease we'll be able to see where genetics fits in.

How will you do that?

We know that health is determined by what someone is exposed to during their lifetime (environment), their personal susceptibility (genetic make-up) and chance. The 45 and Up Study can account for all three factors. Through our questionnaires people tell us what has happened to them and what they have been exposed to. We have very large numbers of participants so we can deal with chance. By adding

blood samples we will also be able to look at genetic factors and build a picture to better explain the complexity of what happens inside people's cells.

Where's the work at?

We've completed a pilot study, in which 749 participants from Wagga Wagga and Parramatta filled in a brief questionnaire, had some physical measurements (height, weight, waist circumference, blood pressure and heart rate) taken, and donated a small blood sample. We plan to do the same thing with 100,000 people, freeze all the blood samples and then follow people over time and see who develops various health conditions and who doesn't. Then we'll go back to the blood samples and compare people who did and didn't develop the diseases. Ultimately, we'll incorporate all the lifestyle and environmental data and create a complete picture of disease risk.

What is the value of all this information to the community?

Our population is ageing and we need to get smart about how we spend our health budget. Disease is complex and having high



Professor Emily Banks, 45 and Up Study Scientific Director

quality information on risk factors, genetics, chance and outcome will help us deal with this complexity in a more informed way. At the moment, we are only just starting to learn how genetic information can help with health and health decisions in the community. We believe it is an area of great potential so it is in the community's interest to have in-depth research to find out more.

Did you know?

Information provided by participants in the 45 and Up Study is being used in many studies, covering a wide range of health, medical and social issues. The following are 'snippets' from just a few of these.

A good night's sleep

Sleep is increasingly recognised as important for health and wellbeing, and sleep duration has been linked to adverse health outcomes. This study found both short and long sleep patterns are common among middle aged Australians. Short sleep, of less than 7 hours per night, is associated with long working hours and is a risk factor for obesity. Long sleep, more than 9 hours per night, is more likely to be a consequence of obesity and related conditions, such as sleep apnea.

Get off the sofa or risk obesity

Whether you are young, old, disabled, male, female, rich or poor, the more time you spend in front of a screen the greater your risk of obesity. This study showed people who spend eight or more hours a day in front of a screen have double the risk of

obesity compared with those with less than two hours of screen time a day. It suggests current campaigns promoting 30 minutes of exercise a day should also take sedentary time into consideration to prevent obesity.

Hidden group of Australians

A high rate of preventable health problems has been identified among older Australians who are relying on home and community care (HACC) services to remain in their homes. This study found HACC clients tend to be sedentary and have high rates of falls. Many have chronic health conditions including diabetes, heart disease and depression as well as high rates of both underweight and overweight, and low levels of physical activity. Identifying this hidden group offers enormous potential for health improvement programs that target lifestyle risk factors through the HACC sector.

Depression and cancer

Many people with cancer have excellent long term survival with minimal disability, however a significant number experience physical disability as a result of their cancer, its treatment, or some other comorbid condition. This study found the risk of psychological distress in long term cancer survivors relates much more strongly to their level of disability resulting from their cancer than from the diagnosis of cancer itself. The findings suggest people can adapt to a diagnosis of cancer where they have good functional capacity. Cancer survivors can be reassured they should be able to re-establish their emotional equilibrium following a diagnosis and treatment, particularly if they remain able-bodied.

ARE YOU MOVING?

Have you moved recently or changed any of your contact details? It is important that our records are up to date. If any of your details have changed, please let us know by filling in the insert provided with this newsletter or contact:

Infoline: 1300 45 11 45
Fax: 02 9514 5952
Email: 45andUp@saxinstitute.org.au
Post: The 45 and Up Study
GPO Box 5289 Sydney NSW 2001
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MOMENTUM

The value of the information you give to the 45 and Up Study is that it is available for researchers all over Australia to use. All projects must meet our high standards for scientific quality and ethical integrity. Of course, we do not give these researchers any information that would mean they could identify you personally unless you have specifically agreed to this. Already, we have given approval to almost 90 applications. Over 80 of these projects have commenced, and nine of these are now complete.

We also give approval for some researchers to invite our participants to join smaller, more targeted projects, called sub-studies, where our participants can choose to give more information about themselves. More information on these sub-studies is below. Some have already completed recruitment, but for others you may still receive an invitation to join. We encourage you to do so. If you are interested and would like more information, please check our website for the progress of these sub-studies.



The Skin Health Study will invite approximately 9000 participants to provide blood and skin cell samples and complete a questionnaire about their health and lifestyle. This project will look at viral and lifestyle risk factors for skin cancer, such as smoking. If you have already received an invitation to join the Skin Health Study and not replied, it is not too late to take part. Just call the 45 & Up Study Infoline on 1300 45 11 45 for further information.



The Life Histories and Health Project will collect data from participants to identify the long term impacts of employment, housing and migration during Australia's post-war era, and the health implications for those who are now moving into retirement. In coming months, 2,400 Study participants will be invited to join this in-depth project.



The Retirement Transition and Health Project will collect detailed information from 2000 participants, over four years, related to their retirement plans and expectations moving to retirement.



The SEEF Project has sent a questionnaire to the first 100,000 participants to collect more detailed information about the social, economic and environmental factors that influence health.



The Diabetes Risk Factor Survey recontacted 2000 participants to validate self report of diabetes and collect further information about their health status, treatment and management of diabetes and related health care.



The Housing and Independent Living Project studied the home and neighbourhood environments of 200 community dwelling older people, to examine the extent to which these environments can be considered 'supportive'.



The CREDO Research Project is a trial of a web-based program to relieve depression, cognitive function and medication adherence in people with, or at risk of developing, cardiovascular disease. The researchers invited 8000 participants to join the project and are currently analysing the data provided.



Your personal information

The 45 and Up Study is grateful for your ongoing participation and contribution to improving health in Australia. We want to assure you that all information given to the Study by you or by other organisations remains confidential and is used for health research only. We have comprehensive policies and procedures to keep your

data secure. Taking part in the Study is entirely your decision, and you can withdraw at any time by calling the Study Infoline on 1300 45 11 45 or emailing us at 45andUp@saxinstitute.org.au. Your choice will not affect the health care or benefits you receive, or disadvantage you in any way.

The 45 and Up Study is managed by the Sax Institute in collaboration with major partner, Cancer Council NSW, and partners: the National Heart Foundation of Australia (NSW Division); *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*; NSW Health; Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Human Services, NSW; and UnitingCare Ageing. Copyright 2011

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