

A world-first AGEING HEALTH study

PARTICIPANT NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN/WINTER 2024

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE FUTURE

Greek philosopher, Heraclitus (500 BC), is often credited for the idea that 'change is the only constant in life'. Today, this saying is a poignant reminder of the challenge to secure funding for research and the need to adapt to circumstance.

We promised to let you know the outcome of a major application to continue ASPREE-XT beyond 2024. As outlined in the enclosed letter, we unfortunately missed out on this bid for future funding of ASPREE-XT.

It's not the end of ASPREE-XT, but it has necessitated a change to study conduct. With a few changes to study activities, this important research continues while we seek other funding opportunities.

We stress that the ASPREE-XT study has not finished - but the study activities have changed.

Changes to study activities

Face-to-face study visits and phone calls in Australia and in the US have been phased out for the time being. This means that you may not hear from us as often as you used to. You won't get a call to book in an annual face-to-face study visit or be asked health questions over the phone.



Otherwise, ASPREE-XT largely continues as usual. Our **Head Office is open**, the study **website (aspree.org) is live**, and **you can still contact us** by phone **1800 728 745**, or via email (**aspree@monash.edu**) if you need to. Please do let us know **if your contact details change**.

Applications for funding

Study investigators in both countries are applying for funding to continue ASPREE-XT beyond 2024.

In the future, study activities may be conducted over the phone, by mail, or some other form. We really don't know - all study activities are dependent on the level of funding awarded to it.

The ASPREE project is public-funded research. This means the research is not-for-profit, free of commercial influence, and findings are shared to benefit the broader community. On the other hand, the public purse is limited and vied for by many a researcher!

It's no small feat for the ASPREE project to have been continuously funded by the US government's National Institutes of Health (NIH) for the best part of 14 years.

What happens now?

We continue to submit applications for funding. Teams of staff are busy collating and analysing health information that you have generously shared with the study up to this point.

The ASPREE Biobank and Microbiome sub-studies continue. Members of these teams may reach out to you by mail or phone in due course. Your participation in these sub-studies is very welcome (see page 3 for details).

If you have recently received a questionnaire for the ALSOP (ASPREE Longitudinal Study of Older Persons) sub-study, we would greatly appreciate your responses. The ALSOP sub-study helps identify factors that affect the wellbeing of older adults.

We will be holding study updates in Melbourne and some regional centres (see back page).

Then later this year, you will receive a summary of your own journey through the ASPREE project.

We hope to also be able to bring good news of funding success, and a clearer picture of how the study will continue in the future.

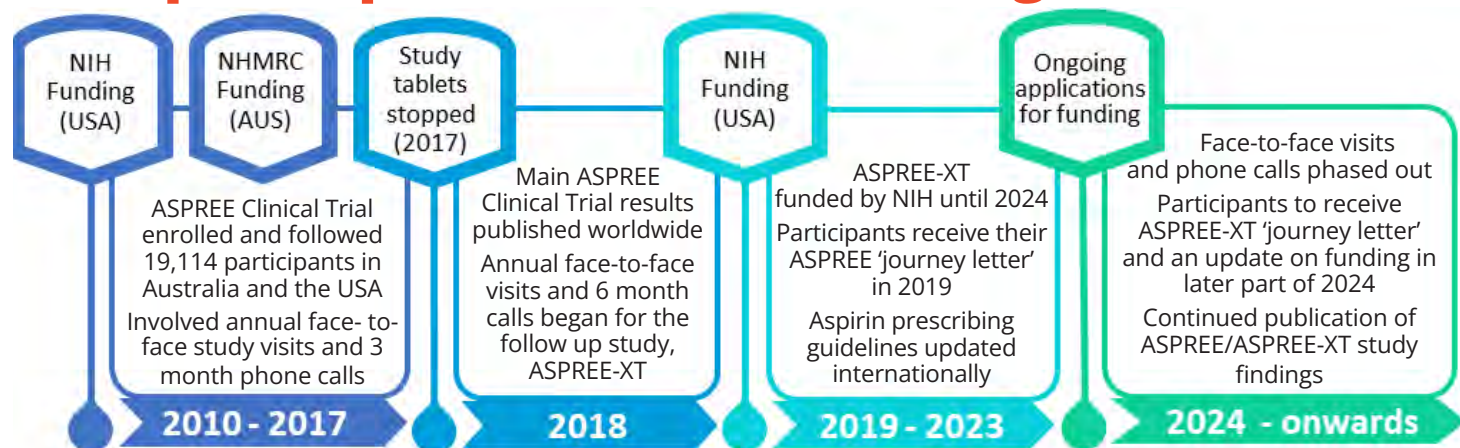
.. THE ASPREE-XT STUDY HAS NOT FINISHED - BUT THE STUDY ACTIVITIES HAVE CHANGED

Meanwhile, researchers will be analysing health information collected during the ASPREE-XT study to determine whether being on aspirin for a period of time has long-lasting effects on aspects of health and disease, such as cancer.

Whatever the future holds for the ASPREE project, stand proud of the impact that you, with the support of your GP, have made on the health of future generations! Head over the page for a brief outline of the project's journey and your role in medical research.

THE RESEARCH

Your participation in ASPREE changed healthcare



Above: An illustration of progress and major milestones in the ASPREE Project from 2010 - 2024. Recruitment into the ASPREE trial ran 2010 - 2014.

We can divide the ASPREE project into two highly successful phases: the ASPREE trial, which involved taking low dose (100mg) daily aspirin or a matched placebo; and the current follow up ASPREE-XT study (no study tablets).

The ASPREE trial was the first study of the effect of aspirin on disability-free survival. This is important because physical disability, illness and dementia impact on an older person's independence and quality of life.

The trial compared the total number of people who remained alive without dementia or persistent physical disability (that required help to do everyday tasks, such as showering), in the aspirin group versus the placebo group.

Overall, this trial found that low dose aspirin did not prolong life

free of disability in otherwise *healthy* adults (*those who did not have a medical need to take aspirin*), mostly aged 70 years and older.

This was a **new and significant medical discovery**. Furthermore, your participation demonstrated the importance of conducting medical research in older adults.

Within a few years, findings from the ASPREE trial influenced revisions of international medical guidelines for the use of aspirin, affecting millions of older persons around the world.

Very few studies can be readily translated into medical guidelines. ASPREE is testament to the quality of the study and commitment by you, our participants, and your GPs, to research.

Medical guidelines help doctors together with their older patients,

around the world, to make decisions about their healthcare.

Your participation in the current ASPREE-XT study enables researchers to investigate the longer term effects of taking aspirin on physical and cognitive health and diseases, such as dementia and cancer.

The ASPREE-XT phase is also key to help understand a broad range of factors that contribute to one's health as we age. (A few of these factors are shown on page 3.)

Not many studies focus only on older adults. Findings from both phases of the ASPREE project directly impact future generations of ageing adults!

We are deeply grateful for your support for ASPREE and hope that you will stay in the study as long as funding permits it to continue.

NEW FINDINGS: walking for transport may prolong life

Older adults who walked instead of taking motorised transport at least once a week, lived longer than those who didn't.

Until the ASPREE project, evidence about transport walking in initially healthy older adults was scarce.

Transport walking refers to when you walk for a specific purpose, such as to a medical appointment or to shop, instead of using motorised transport. It's different from recreational walking, like taking a stroll in the park, which wasn't part of this study.

Walking for transport once or

more a week was linked to a 25 % lower risk of dying compared to no walking for transport purposes.

The study involved 11,600 Australian participants, who self-reported how often they walked for transport in the ALSOP (ASPREE Longitudinal Study of Older Persons) questionnaires, close to enrolment in the ASPREE trial.

Among participants, who were an average 75 years of age, 44% reported engaging in transport-walking every day, 32% more than once a week, 22% rarely or once a week, and 3% never did it.

After an average of almost seven years follow-up during the ASPREE trial and ASPREE-XT phases, those who reported transport walking at least once a week were more likely to live longer than those who didn't. Researchers said these findings emphasise the importance of creating opportunities for older adults to leave the car at home when they can.

Measures include good public infrastructure such as building walkways, and creating safe environments that enable older adults to walk for transport.

>> Stay informed of the ASPREE project and sub-studies - visit www.aspree.org/aus

Call out: ASPREE-XT sub-studies

Thanks to those who have already contributed to the latest wave of biobank (blood/urine) collections and returned microbiome kits.

We are still seeking contributions from those who have not had the opportunity to contribute to the Biobank and Microbiome sub-studies.

The ASPREE Biobank

The ASPREE Biobank is a treasured resource of blood and urine samples from more than 12,000 participants. Its purpose is to enable researchers to understand diseases better and find new ways to treat them.

Collection of the last round of samples in this ASPREE-XT phase is underway. You do not need to have donated to the biobank before to be involved. The biobank team will arrange sample collection with you. (The process is similar to having a routine blood and urine test).

The latest wave of biobank samples will also support research undertaken by the ASPREE Microbiome study.

Microbiome Study

Trillions of 'bugs' or microbes (such as bacteria and viruses) live in our intestine (gut). This sub-study is the first large investigation into the impact that the gut microbiome has on health as we age.

An imbalance of 'bugs' in the gut microbiome is increasingly linked

to a range of health issues from depression to frailty (see image below). Yet very few microbiome studies have involved older adults.

Participation involves collecting a stool sample and tongue swab in the privacy of your home.

Microbiome + Biobank studies

Our gut microbiomes produce chemical by-products that move into the bloodstream and circulate around our body. Some gut microbiome by-products in the blood (called biomarkers) may be harmful to health, while others beneficial.

When samples for the Microbiome and Biobank sub-studies are collected within six months of each other, researchers are able to better study links between gut health, microbiome biomarkers in blood and urine, and learn what they mean to health.

Additional Microbiome samples

We are also seeking participants to provide further microbiome samples, approx. fortnightly over 2-3 months.

These samples will help researchers determine how the gut microbiome of older adults naturally fluctuates over a period of time.

ASPREE-XT participants interested in contributing to one or both the Biobank and Microbiome studies, please call our team on 1800 728 745.

Some aspects of ageing health studied so far



Stroke



Heart disease



Cancer



Physical ability



Mental & Social Health



Dementia



Kidney health



Medicine use



Genetics



Lifestyle factors



Sleep Apnoea



Hearing loss



Falls & Fractures



Biomarkers & Hormones

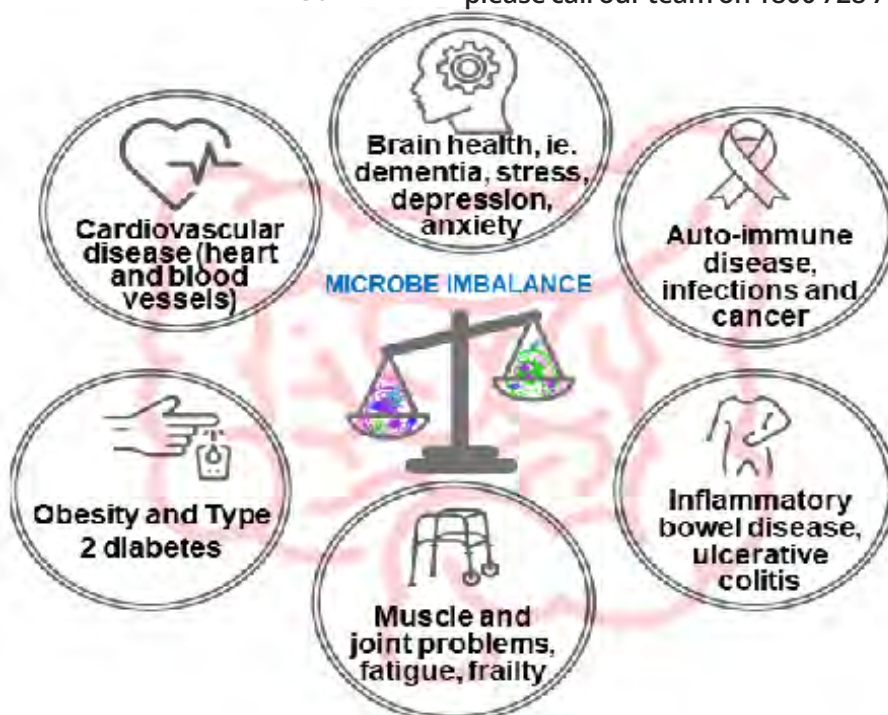


Age-related Macular Degeneration

ABOVE: An illustration of some of the aspects of health being studied in the ASPREE project. Researchers will often analyse various factors in conjunction with one another to understand how factors interact and their effect on health.

There are currently more than 200 ASPREE-related analyses published.

Please note: Health information used in analyses has been stripped of identifying details.



Above: modified image from Baptista LC, Sun Y, Carter CS, Buford TW. Crosstalk Between the Gut Microbiome and Bioactive Lipids: Therapeutic Targets in Cognitive Frailty. *Front Nutr.* 2020 Mar 11;7:17. doi: 10.3389/fnut.2020.00017.

STUDY UPDATES

The year 2024 kicked off with a series of study updates in Bendigo, Adelaide, Victor Harbor, Geelong, South Gippsland, East Gippsland and Hobart regions.

These informal presentations are a great opportunity to share with you and your guest, updates on study progress, and to answer any question that you may have.

Study updates will be held in Melbourne and some regional areas in the coming months. Invitations will be sent in the post.

Below are a few pics from recent updates.



HOBART, TAS

ABOVE: Bob and Graeme (right) have known each other for 75 years, both growing up on the North-West Coast of Tasmania. They did not know the other was part of ASPREE-XT, and only discovered this when they met on the bus on their way to the study update!



VICTOR HARBOR, SA

TEAM UPDATE AND NOTES OF THANKS

In addition to a change in study visit activity, we recently farewelled a number of staff from regional and metropolitan areas.

We are incredibly proud of our admin (call centre) and field staff who conducted study activity with professionalism and grace.

The overarching sentiment from the teams themselves is one of gratitude for the opportunity to be a part of your journey in the ASPREE project.

Members of the team who you've seen in person and spoken to on phones, feel especially privileged through their personal interactions with you.

You, our participants, have made, and continue to make, a difference to healthcare for future generations.

Through the course of your journey in the ASPREE project, you have left an indelible impression on those who met you. Some members of our team who have moved on, wanted to share these short messages (below) to sum up their experience.

We hope to secure sufficient funding to resume some form of in-person study activities in the future.

"It has been an honour to spend time with such a wonderful group of participants in ASPREE-XT. I have been humbled, learnt a great deal, laughed and cried with you and I'm full of gratitude for my time working on such a great project. You will be missed!" Kate

"Thank you to all of the Adelaide participants who so willingly gave up their time to conduct the visits. Your generosity has led to a better understanding of health in older persons. I thoroughly enjoyed catching up with you each year." Keren

"I will treasure the memories of the many visits we have had, and often very personal stories that you have shared with me over the years.

ASPREE has gained a lot of very valuable health information about ageing, but I feel I have gained so much more in the special warmth and compassion I have felt for knowing you all." Gillian

"Dear Melbourne West and Sapphire Coast participants,

I'd like to thank you for making the last 13 years so enjoyable. It has been a privilege getting to know each and everyone of you and sharing in your health journey.

I will miss you all, but will cherish the wisdom and humour you have imparted on me. Warmest well wishes." Mary

"To my beautiful participants who I have seen yearly for over 10 years.

Thank you for your inspiration, dedication, wonderful stories & great cups of tea.

You enriched my life no end for which I will be forever grateful. It's been an absolute privilege to have met you all!" Lynda

"The thing I loved the most (about ASPREE-XT) was the simple but profound life wisdom and good humour my participants shared with me." Tanya

"From the Warrnambool team of myself, Mark and Kate, a huge thank you to our wonderful participants who have been so loyal and diligent with your study visits. It has been a joy getting to know you all, and we will miss seeing you for your annual visits. We wish you all the best for whatever lies ahead." Julie

We send our very best wishes to members of the team embarking on the next chapter of their lives.

Staying in touch with you is very important

Please let us know:

- If you have a new address
- Have a new GP
- A change in circumstance



CALL:
1800 728 745

(toll free from a landline)

Email: aspree@monash.edu

Website: www.aspree.org

ASPREE-XT Funding Organisations

- National Institute on Aging (NIA/NIH in the USA)
- National Cancer Institute (NCI/NIH in the USA)
- National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia (NHMRC)

ASPREE-XT Collaborating Organisations

- Monash University
- Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania
- Australian National University
- The University of Adelaide
- Berman Center for Outcomes & Clinical Research (Minnesota, USA)
- 21 study sites across the USA