

# About a **TABLET**

SUMMER 2019/2020

## World-first health and ageing study in older people

### ASPREE-XT KEY FACTS

- ASPREE-XT is a follow-up health study in more than 15,000 ASPREE participants in Australia and the US
- Investigates whether taking aspirin during the ASPREE trial has long lasting effects on health, such as dementia or cancer
- Is Australia's largest health study to track the effects that demographic, genomic, environmental and other factors may have on the health and independence of people more than 74 years old
- Involves annual study visits (a summary is sent to GPs) and biannual phone calls
- Health data collected includes:
  - physical measures
  - non-fasting blood tests
  - thinking and memory exercises
  - physical ability
  - self-reported quality of life and well-being
  - current medications
- Co-ordinated through 16 sites in south eastern Australia and 22 sites in the US
- Primarily undertaken through general practice and supported by thousands of Australian GPs
- Funded by the US and Australian governments

## Health study funded!

We couldn't be more delighted to announce that the world-first ASPREE-XT (eXTension) study has sufficient funding to continue to track the health of ASPREE participants.

The recent grant from the US NIA (National Institute on Aging) enables our participants to continue to contribute information to understand factors that affect our health as we age.

ASPREE-XT has two main aims:

- 1) to determine long lasting effects of aspirin on health, such as on cancer, dementia and other aspects of ageing including frailty.
- 2) to identify the impact that medical conditions, lifestyle, the environment, genetics and other factors have on health and ageing.

ASPREE-XT builds on many millions of individual pieces of health data collected in the ASPREE trial. It fulfills a rare opportunity to investigate the effects of aspirin and other factors on quality of life and independence for older people.

By sharing your health information for as long as possible in ASPREE-XT, you are giving researchers the opportunity to learn why some older people become frail and unwell, while others can still run marathons!

With so many participants and the extensive health data collected, ASPREE-XT will be one of the largest observational studies of ageing conducted in Australia.

Thousands of general practitioners are supporting the study. We know life-expectancy has increased globally and ASPREE-XT will continue to address questions of relevance for GPs caring for their older patients.

Information  
 Brochure

A STUDY OF THE  
 LONG-TERM EFFECTS  
 OF ASPIRIN AND OTHER  
 FACTORS ON HEALTHY  
 LIFESPAN

ASPREEXT  
ASpirin in Reducing Events in the Elderly - eXTension



ABOVE: ASPREE-XT brochures are available at study visits, study updates, on our website [aspree.org](http://aspree.org), or contact our team on 1800 728 745 for a copy.

The collection of your health information will be important for understanding the health of current and future generations. We sincerely thank you and your GP for your ongoing support.

Links to the formal announcement of the grant can be found in the 'news' section of our website [aspree.org](http://aspree.org)

## RESEARCH TALK

*If you are interested in science and health and want to know more about research, this column is for you.*

### What is the difference between primary and secondary prevention?

Primary prevention is the prevention of disease or a medical event from occurring in the first place. Secondary prevention is prevention of a repeat health event, such as preventing another heart attack or stroke.

ASPREE was a primary prevention aspirin trial in healthy older people. Participants were seen by their GP and all had to be otherwise 'healthy' eg, without known cardiovascular disease (diseases of the heart and blood vessels), dementia or significant physical disability - upon enrolment into the trial.

For this reason, the main ASPREE trial findings are relevant to healthy older people. The results *do not apply* to people who have a medical need to take aspirin. Always speak to your GP for individual advice before you start or stop taking daily low-dose aspirin.

### What is a longitudinal study?

ASPREE-XT is a longitudinal study which involves studying the same individuals (ASPREE participants) over an extended period of time. Previous longitudinal studies have very successfully identified factors contributing to disease. We thank all our ASPREE-XT participants for your ongoing commitment to improve the health of future generations.

### Why use the same thinking and memory exercises every year?

The main reason is to capture whether there has been a change over a period of time. If the measuring tool (the exercises) changed, then the data could not be readily compared.

**The three main ASPREE papers published in September 2018 can be downloaded for free at <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1800722>**

## Research papers

Since our last newsletter, ASPREE investigators have published several papers related to the trial and its sub-studies, including the 'SHOW' study (below). For a full list of printed ASPREE publications visit the 'For Researchers' section of [aspree.org](http://aspree.org) ([aspree.org/aus/researchers/aspree-publications/](http://aspree.org/aus/researchers/aspree-publications/)).



**Blood samples from more than 5000 women in the ASPREE Healthy Ageing Biobank have established a new reference range for sex hormones in older women.**

**SHOW (Sex Hormones in Older Women)** is an ASPREE sub-study which has given doctors, for the very **first time**, a 'normal' reference range of sex hormones (such as oestrone, testosterone) in healthy older women. Sex hormones have been implicated in health, however researchers needed to first establish what was a 'normal' range for women aged 70 and older.

The paper, *'Testosterone and estrone increase from the age of 70 years; findings from the Sex Hormones in Older Women Study'* was published in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism earlier this year. The study measured hormone levels in blood samples taken from 5326 Australian women at enrolment into the ASPREE trial and subsequently stored in the ASPREE Healthy Ageing Biobank. Participants ranged from 70 - 95 years of age.

SHOW found that oestrone and testosterone hormones levels increased with age and that testosterone levels in women aged 70 plus were similar to levels in premenopausal women. The authors published the reference range and concluded that further investigation to understand the effect of sex hormones on healthy ageing was warranted.

## ASPREE-XT team news

Earlier this year we farewelled administration officer, Jenny Stephens. Before she left, Jenny shared what she gained from working with you, our participants.

*"Nine years is a long time, but I just wanted to go through a few things that I thought were worth mentioning," she wrote in her farewell speech.*

*"The participants have been a big reason why I have stayed here for so long. As much as it is scary to get older, it does put your mind at ease when you talk to active, fun and positive people. The stories that we hear and pass onto each other in the admin team give us a lot of laughter and inspiration (obviously also a lot of sadness). Thank you all for being a part of my journey for the last nine years...."*

We wish Jenny all the very best for the future.



**ABOVE: Jenny Stephens has spoken to many participants over the phone during her nine years in the admin team.**

# FORMER US PRESIDENT LINK TO ASPREE-XT REVEALED AT STUDY UPDATES

Hundreds of ASPREE-XT participants learned of a surprising link between Franklin D Roosevelt (FDR) and the ASPREE-XT study at a series of 'study updates' held across Melbourne and in Wollongong and Nowra recently.

These friendly, informative events, include an approximate 45 minute presentation by a senior member of the team, followed by a cuppa.

Study updates are an opportunity to learn more about your medical research. The research is very interesting! We discuss the main findings from the ASPREE trial and explain how your contribution impacts medical care of current and future ageing generations.

We also bring you up to date on the progress and developments of the follow up ASPREE-XT study.

Many participants ask questions about ASPREE and ASPREE-XT in the group setting or one-on-one with a member of our team afterwards.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of these events is sharing a cuppa with fellow participants after the presentation. Our team thoroughly enjoys catching up with you.

Over the years, study updates have led to renewed long-lost friendships (no marriage proposals that we know of as yet) and we have learned of many attendees' sporting, literary and other exciting work/life achievements.



*ABOVE: A rare visual history of two friends involved in medical research. Former work pals Pat (left) and Norma (right) had lost touch for 20 years until they saw each other at a study update in 2013. The photo, within a photo, within a photo, records the two friends' catch-ups at three study updates, including this year's event at the MBI in Clayton, Melbourne.*

The updates are not mandatory, but most participants find them very interesting and worthwhile. We encourage you to attend your local study update when able.

As much as feasible, we do try to find convenient, central locations for participants in any given region.

More updates are scheduled in

regional Victoria, Burnie, Launceston and southern NSW and in Adelaide Hobart and Canberra in 2020. Keep an eye out for your invitation in the post. We look forward to seeing you and your guests.

PS. If you can't make your local study update, we'll reveal the FDR link in a future newsletter.



*ABOVE: Popular presenter, Associate Prof. Robyn Woods giving an overview of longitudinal research at the study update in Clayton, November 2019.*



*ABOVE: ASPREE-XT's researcher, Dan, caught up with local participant Bep, at a study update in Frankston.*

## Your stories

### What it takes to be a Santa's Helper



Not just anyone can be an official Santa's helper. Ask ASPREE-XT participant Jim and he'll list what he has happily undertaken every year for the past five years to retain the title.

This includes attending annual 'Santa Refresher School' to perfect his "Ho, ho, ho", to learn the latest, most popular toys as well as emergency and fire drills. But it was life experience and wisdom that had prepared him for six year old Eva's request. She wanted Santa to bring back her grandmother for Christmas. Accustomed to exuberant children and the odd alarmed toddler, Eva's wish still stands out to Jim (pictured left).

Unperturbed, he quietly explained to the child (and her relieved mother) that if Grandma was in her heart and her mind, she'd be with her much longer than Christmas - she'd be with her forever.

### Participants scoop Australian Masters Medals

It's fortunate that these sports champions are strong - they need plenty of muscle to carry all their medals from the 2019 Australian Masters Games held in Adelaide. Hearty congratulations to three inspiring older Australians!



ABOVE: Leon Stanley's 11th Masters games tally was an astonishing ten medals from 11 events (track, swimming and tennis) in the 80 - 85 year division.



ABOVE: ASPREE-XT participant, Brian Robertson, and wife Dorothy, walked away with eight table tennis medals between them.

Brian won three gold and one silver in the 80+ years division. Dorothy won four gold in the Women's 80+ division.

### DONATING BODIES TO MEDICAL RESEARCH

Several participants have asked for information about donating their body to medical research.

We understand this is not for everyone. If you do find this topic too confronting, skip to another section of the newsletter!

#### Victorian Brain Bank

For those interested, the Victorian Brain Bank (VBB) stores and co-ordinates brain tissue samples for research into a range of neurological disorders, such as Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease.

Individuals do not have to have been affected by a disease of the brain to be a donor.

#### Body Donor Program

Many universities operate a body donor program in their states/regions. These include Melbourne University, University of Wollongong, University of Adelaide, University of Tasmania and the Australian National University.

Body donors assist with teaching and study of human anatomy and scientific research.

There are some exclusions to being a donor.

### Staying in touch with you is very important

- Have you moved?
- Do you have feedback? We love to hear constructive feedback.
- Have a question about ASPREE or ASPREE-XT?
- Have a story to share?
- Rather receive 'About a Tablet' newsletter by email?



CALL:

**1800 728 745**

(toll free from a landline)

Email: [aspree@monash.edu](mailto:aspree@monash.edu)

Website: [www.aspree.org](http://www.aspree.org)

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#### ASPREE-XT Funding Organisations

- National Institute on Aging (NIA/NIH in the US)
- National Cancer Institute (NCI/NIH in the US)
- 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, US)