

About a **TABLET**

SUMMER 2021-2022

World-first health and ageing study in older adults

ASPREE-XT

ASPREE-XT is a world-first study following the health of more than 15,000 older adults who participated in the ASPREE trial in Australia and the USA.

KEY POINTS

- It is the first large scale follow-up study to investigate how demographic, genetic, environmental and other factors affect health and independence as we age
- The first study to determine whether taking aspirin during the ASPREE trial has long lasting beneficial effects on health, such as dementia or cancer in older adults
- Involves in-person annual study visits (as permitted in COVID-19 times) and one phone call between visits
- Sends a summary of the in-person visit to a nominated GP
- Captures comprehensive high quality health data including:
 - physical measures, e.g. BP
 - non-fasting blood tests
 - thinking and memory
 - physical ability
 - self-reported quality of life and well-being
 - major health events
 - current medications
- Co-ordinated through 16 sites in south-eastern Australia and 22 sites in the USA
- Supported by more than 4000 general practitioners
- Funded by the USA and Australian governments

Innovative analyses on ASPREE data and sub-study data continue to yield first time discoveries

Alcohol and health findings in the news

A new analysis of ASPREE data found an alcohol intake of 1 - 2 standard drinks a day, up to a total of 10 per week, does not appear to increase the risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD) for healthy older adults.

This is the first study in healthy older adults to look at the implications of alcohol intake on cardiovascular disease (CVD) i.e. heart and blood vessel health, including stroke.

Researchers compared CVD health data from participants who drank alcohol, versus those who abstained. They found a moderate intake was associated with fewer cases of CVD and lower mortality overall, regardless of gender.

A standard drink (10gm of alcohol) is about 100ml of wine, 280ml of beer or 30ml of spirits.

The type of alcohol was not specified in this analysis.

Participants included in the study

Almost 18,000 participants in the analysis had an average age of 74 years and 43% were current (4%) smokers or former (39%) smokers.

Participants reported that:

- 18.6% didn't drink alcohol
- 37.3% reported 1-50 g/week
- 19.7% reported 51-100 g/week
- 15.6% reported 101-150 g/week
- 8.9% reported >150 g/week

ASPREE participants were all healthy at study entry and likely to be socially and physically active, factors that are beneficial to health.

It is possible that social interactions,



Speak to your GP for individual advice on alcohol intake. (Image: istock)

which are often associated with moderate drinking, may contribute to the effect on CVD in addition to, or rather than, an effect of alcohol itself. Further research to look at the effect of alcohol on other diseases in older adults, such as cancer, is needed.

Too soon to pop the champagne

ASPREE researchers say these findings do **not** suggest older adults should start to drink or increase alcohol consumption, as further research is needed.

Excess alcohol intake increases the risk of other chronic diseases such as cancer, liver disease and pancreatitis.

Your GP is the best person to advise on alcohol consumption.

"Alcohol consumption and risks of cardiovascular disease and all-cause mortality in healthy older adults" was published in the European Journal of Preventive Cardiology in October 2021.

RESEARCH TALK

ASPREE trial findings contribute to USA-led aspirin review

A group of internationally recognised health experts have incorporated ASPREE trial findings into their draft aspirin guidelines.

The influential US Preventive Services Taskforce (USPSTF) drafted new guidelines that recommended against healthy older adults using aspirin for primary prevention. That is, to take aspirin to prevent a first heart attack or stroke.

The new draft recommendations made major news the USA.

They come after the American College of Cardiology and American Heart Association adopted ASPREE findings into their aspirin guidelines shortly after publication of the results.

The USPSTF draft guidelines are currently open to input from physicians and academics around the world before being finalised.

ALSOP questionnaire

Thank you for the fantastic response to the **medical ALSOP** -XT (ASPREE-XT Longitudinal Study of Older Persons) questionnaire that we sent out mid last year.

The ALSOP sub-study collects important information on factors that can affect independence and quality of life, which we cannot otherwise collect at study visits.

A sister ALSOP questionnaire asks about aspects of **social** health.

“Other than the ASPREE project, there are no long term studies of older Australians that can provide such detailed data to learn about risk factors, medical and social history, treatment and outcomes that are relevant to the care of our older patients.”

GPs and ASPREE Investigators: Prof Mark Nelson (Tasmania) and Prof Nigel Stocks (Adelaide)

Published ASPREE papers

Very few high quality studies focus only on older adults.

ASPREE and ASPREE sub-studies provide important knowledge about aspirin and a range of factors affecting ageing health.

Findings are shared with scholars and health practitioners around the world, ensuring your participation benefits many.



Website page: aspree.org/aus/publications/

Investigating social health and heart health

Loneliness, social isolation and low social support may put older Australians at risk of heart attack and stroke, a new analysis found.

This is the first study to examine three components of social health (feelings of loneliness, social isolation and low social support) and cardiovascular disease (CVD) in older adults.

An analysis of social and clinical data in 11,498 ASPREE and ALSOP* participants found:

- 8% (919 participants) reported having poor overall social health
- Men reported being more socially isolated than women, with less social support, but they were also less lonely

- Those reporting overall positive social health tended to be more physically active and have fewer depressive symptoms
- Curiously, social isolation was associated with high blood pressure, which is a known risk factor for CVD

These findings may help provide early insights into the relationship between social health and risk factors for heart disease.

*ALSOP is an ASPREE sub-study (see column on left).

“Social Isolation, Social Support, Loneliness and Cardiovascular Disease Risk Factors: A cross-sectional study among older adults” was published in the Geriatric Psychiatry Journal in 2021.

Effect of statins on thinking and memory examined

It has been suggested that long-term statin use may affect memory and thinking, so we studied this using observational data from ASPREE.

Statins are the first-line cholesterol-lowering drugs to prevent heart attacks and strokes.

This study found that statins are not associated with an increased risk of dementia or changes in thinking and memory.

Researchers examined data from 18,846 ASPREE participants (87% participants were from Australia and 13% from the USA).

They found no significant differences

in thinking and memory in those taking statins at enrolment in ASPREE versus non-statin users at enrolment.

Specifically, over an average of 4.7 years, 3.1% of statin users developed dementia, while 3.0% who were not taking statins, developed dementia.

This is being further investigated in a Monash University led clinical trial of statins in healthy older adults called STAREE (Statins In Reducing Events in the Elderly).

“Effect of Statin Therapy on Cognitive Decline and Incident Dementia in Older Adults” was published in the Journal of American College of Cardiology in 2021.

Visit aspree.org to learn more about your study

We are excited to let you know about the refreshed ASPREE project website (aspree.org) for your computer, tablet or mobile phone.

Our main goal is to provide you with easy to navigate, user-friendly information about your research project. There is no personal health information on this website.

We've improved the structure of information about aspirin, ASPREE, the follow-up ASPREE-XT study, and

more than 18 sub-studies. The updated site includes a 'participants' page, with easy to use drop down boxes, so you'll get more in one quick read without leaving the page.

Above: ASPREE and ASPREE-XT sub-studies are listed on one easy to read page (aspree.org/aus/about-the-aspree-project/sub-studies/)

Above: The new webpage for study participants (aspree.org/aus/for-participants/)

ASPREE's many scientific publications are searchable by year and topic. Use a keyword, such as 'blood pressure' to view all publications (so far) on that topic. Where the medical journal permits, a web link will open the entire research paper.

Above: Where to stay informed of the project's latest news and research (aspree.org/aus/resources-and-media/news/)

The news section (above) gives more in-depth information on study developments, such as a new sub-studies and research findings, that we cannot ordinarily fit in a newsletter. It's here that you will find posts on the project's latest news.

We hope you like the refresh thus far. Email aspree@monash.edu if you would like to read a story or see other content on the website.

COVID impacts MICROBIOME-XT

Unfortunately COVID-19 continues to delay roll-out of the Microbiome-XT sub-study. We hope to have a shipment of microbiome kits by the new year.

STUDY VISITS

Thank you for your understanding as we have had to adapt study activity in line with health advice in the last six months.

STUDY UPDATES

In-person study updates are on hold. However, we would like to keep you informed of study progress via an online webinar.

We will need your current email address to send the invitation and link to the webinar. You can update your email address by sending an email to aspree@monash.edu (with your name or ASPREE ID number).

Team News: New chapter, but not farewell

After 16 years of dedication (and extraordinary hours) at the helm, A/Prof Robyn Woods has passed on the executive baton to Dr Suzanne Orchard.

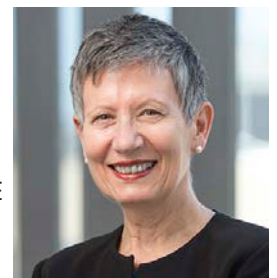
In her semi-retirement, Robyn leads the new ASPREE-XT Microbiome / ALSOP sub-study. She continues as Director of the ASPREE Biobank, is a senior investigator contributing to many publications arising from the ASPREE project and sub-studies, and supervises PhD students.

Highlights of her career are many, including publication of the main ASPREE findings in 2018 and later accepting the ACTA Australian Clinical Trial of the Year Award on behalf of the ASPREE team and participants.

"I am so very proud to have led the exceptional ASPREE, Sub-study and ASPREE-XT teams who are behind outstanding research successes now and in the future," says Robyn.

"I especially want to thank our wonderful participants. You helped answer an important aspirin question and are now increasing our understanding of older age health. Your generosity and commitment is an enduring inspiration."

Suzie was the study's Australian operations manager and a study investigator for many years prior to taking on the new role of Director of ASPREE-XT. "I am very pleased to hand over the management reins to someone as capable and energetic as Suzie," says Robyn.



Above: Robyn Woods



Above: Suzanne Orchard

Participant life

ORDER OF AUSTRALIA



Lawrie Miller was humbled and surprised to receive an Order of Australia, in recognition of 40 years of dedication to the Geelong community, men's homelessness and further education.

"If we live in a community, we need to commit and contribute to that community," says Lawrie, who is an ASPREE-XT participant. "I didn't expect to be given an award for something I found so rewarding."

The 87 year old retired city engineer (pictured above) estimates that he had been involved in more than 16 community groups. This includes time as Executive Director of the Geelong Chamber of Commerce, for which he drove membership from 300 to 900 and was awarded its first Lifetime Membership in 155 years.

BIRTHDAY RUN

Study participant, Pat Shelper, marked her recent 81st birthday with a half marathon in Melbourne.

"I was the only runner in the 75+ age group," laughs Pat, "there wasn't an 80+."

She earned herself a medal (pictured right), and celebrated with cake later that evening. "It was a fun day," says Pat, who ran her first marathon in New York at 70 years young.



DRIVING WITH MARYL



Above: Maryl, a 25 year veteran carriage driver with ponies, Eloise Arctic Rose (grey) and Ruby Rose (chestnut), which she trained for competition.

Tasmania's Maryl Cropper raised enough money to ferry her pony and carriage to compete in Carriage Driving at the 2013 Masters Games, but was a little short for the lodgings.

An overnight swag in a horse-box in Geelong only added to the experience, she says. So did bringing home 3 silver and 1 bronze in single pony events.

Additionally, Maryl trained the Shetland cross pony, 'Eloise Arctic Rose' that won 3 gold for a fellow member from the Northern Tasmanian Driving Society.

Fast forward almost a decade and the 85 year old ASPREE-XT participant still competes in local carriage driving events, complete with era appropriate costume and Eloise.

NEVER TOO OLD TO STUDY

Congratulations to South Gippsland study participant Frank Manintveld (right), who earned his Bachelor of Business at the age of 82.

For six years the dairy farmer studied his degree online - one hour in the morning and then in the evenings after farm work.

"It was good, but it takes a lot of discipline and a commitment," says Frank, who applies his learnings to the farm's management.

He's contemplating taking a short course to learn another language.



The ASPREE-XT team in Australia and the USA, wish you and your loved ones the safest and happiest of festive seasons.

Thank you for your contribution to important medical research in 2021, and we look forward to seeing you again this year.

Staying in touch with you is very important

- **Have you moved?**
- **Have a new GP?**
- **A change in circumstance?**
- **A question about ASPREE or ASPREE-XT?**
- **A story to share?**

Please let us know!



CALL:
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(toll free from a landline)

Email: aspree@monash.edu

Website: www.aspree.org

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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)
- 22 study sites across the USA