

# About a TABLET

WINTER/SPRING 2022

## WORLD-FIRST HEALTH AND AGEING STUDY IN OLDER ADULTS

### AT A GLANCE



MORE THAN 14,000 OLDER ADULTS



42% MALES AND 58% FEMALES



AVERAGE AGE OF  
PARTICIPANTS



GENERAL  
PRACTITIONERS  
WITH PATIENTS IN  
ASPREE-XT



STUDY SITES IN  
AUSTRALIA & USA



APPROVED STUDIES  
OF ASPREE DATA TO  
DATE



RESEARCH  
PUBLICATIONS TO  
DATE



PUBLIC-GOOD  
STUDY FUNDED BY  
THE AUSTRALIAN &  
US GOVERNMENTS



## YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO ASPREE-XT

### Drives better health and wellbeing for older adults

How do we prolong good health and independence?

What else, apart from what we already know - physical and social activities, healthy diet, enough sleep, limited alcohol, not smoking and good control of blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol - staves off illness for older adults?

Thanks to health information shared by you and thousands of participants in ASPREE and the follow up ASPREE-XT study, we are closer to finding new answers.

Sharing your experience of life, in good health and illness gives rise to vital, real world research to improve the health of future generations.

There are an estimated 900 million people around the world over the age of 60 and this is expected to double by 2050.

Your ongoing participation in ASPREE-XT is making an enormous difference to what will be known

about how to stay well as we age and to identify and treat illness earlier.

#### The science of living long and well

Data from the ASPREE study recently gave doctors and scholars new insights on how to identify older adults most at risk of physical disability and dementia.

For the first time, ASPREE researchers used 'machine learning' to understand the interrelationships between 25 risk factors that reduce our ability to live healthy lives, free of disability.

The strongest factor (which none of us can avoid) is time. Advancing years increases the risk of death and disability.

However, of the remaining 24 factors, researchers learned that obesity, current smoking, poor kidney function, reduced hand grip strength, a slower walking speed, depression, diabetes and a decline

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# About AGEING HEALTH



## A message from ASPREE-XT Principal Investigator Prof. John McNeil

The ASPREE project continues to take large strides in health and ageing research nationally and internationally.

Findings from the ASPREE trial in 2018 continue to influence new recommendations for aspirin use for millions of older adults around the world. While it is rare for one trial to propel as much change as ASPREE has done, some of the most significant findings are still to come.

Your participation in the current ASPREE-XT study is driving one of the most important research studies in older adults taking place internationally.

Collecting health information over a prolonged period of time is a powerful form of medical research.

ASPREE-XT captures diverse experiences of ageing health in our community. The study findings will influence many aspects of healthcare in the future. We could not do this without you and your GP's support.

ASPREE-XT will answer critical questions about dementia, disability, heart disease, cancer and many other conditions that may affect older people. It will teach us how and why some older adults become frail with age, while others stay well. No other study of this scale is investigating the factors that affect so many aspects of health in such detail.

Leading researchers and scientists around the world are regularly publishing new learnings from ASPREE and ASPREE-XT in medical journals. These findings are leading to advancements in science, health and medical care of older adults.

We are very grateful for your generosity and support for this world-leading research. Your contribution will lead to discoveries that help future generations to age well.

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in concentration and memory all give clues as to who is most likely to experience ill health in the future, regardless of gender.

In another study of ASPREE data, researchers found a link between older adults experiencing memory problems and who also walked slower, with a higher risk of developing dementia.

These findings provide more evidence that simple measures of gait (walking) speed and thinking and memory may help doctors identify healthy older patients at risk of dementia.

Meanwhile, another group of researchers reported that how older adults perceived their own physical ability could help identify those at a higher risk of cardiovascular disease (disease of the heart and blood vessels) in the future.

In a research first, ASPREE study participants who reported a consistent decline in physical ability over five years were 51% more likely to develop cardiovascular disease compared to those who self-reported

having good physical ability.

Researchers say that declining physical health, such as the reduced ability to walk distances, doesn't necessarily lead to cardiovascular disease or physical disability or dementia. Reduced memory and concentration does not mean you will get dementia. But they might tell you it's time to get a check up or to follow your doctor's advice, such as to exercise.

Hundreds of studies of data from the ASPREE project are in the pipeline, expanding knowledge on what we know (and don't yet know) about health and ageing.

**What science learns comes from your contribution. Everyone's contribution to ASPREE-XT is equally valuable and gives all sides of the ageing experience.**

Thank you for sharing your ageing health journey so others may benefit. Details of studies mentioned in this newsletter (plus others!) are in the 'news' section of our website [aspree.org/aus](http://aspree.org/aus). Or email our team: [aspree@monash.edu](mailto:aspree@monash.edu) for a link.



*Above: our genetic information (data) reads as a pattern of the letters G, A, C and T.*

Genetic researchers from around the world are pooling genetic data to accelerate genetic breakthroughs.

The NIA (National Institute on Aging, which also funds ASPREE-XT) funded a study to examine genetic data from 94,000 US and European residents who developed Alzheimer's disease.

As a result of having more genetic data to analyse, researchers discovered five *new* risk genes for the disease.

Scientists now know where to look for changes to better understand how Alzheimer's disease may start and progress at a genetic level, as well as to develop medicines that might turn 'off' the genes.

Anonymous genetic data from ASPREE Biobank participants will soon be contributing to similar international genetic studies to help discover new ways to prevent and/or treat diseases of ageing.

ASPREE genetic data will only be available for studies by accredited genetic researchers working in relevant research groups (consortia).

Additionally, ASPREE genetic data is de-identified (stripped of details that may identify the donor) before being included in a consortia-based study.

The greater the volume of genetic data in a study, the greater the likelihood of new and vital genetic discoveries in a much shorter time frame than was ever possible before.

**>> Stay informed of the ASPREE project and sub-studies - visit [www.aspree.org/aus](http://www.aspree.org/aus)**



# WHAT WE'VE LEARNED ABOUT

## Breathing disorders during sleep

Don't count on daytime sleepiness as a sign of breathing problems in your sleep. The majority of older adults with sleep disordered breathing in our sub-study were not excessively sleepy during the day.

Sleep disordered breathing is a broad term for breathing difficulties that happen during sleep and can range from loud snoring to sleep apnoea, in which breathing stops for a period of time.

In a recent analysis of data from the ASPREE sub-study, SNORE-ASA, we learned that just over 80% of 1400 participants unknowingly had some degree of sleep disordered breathing.

SNORE-ASA participants wore a portable sleep apnoea device in their own beds overnight and completed

questionnaires and thinking and memory exercises. A small sub-group also had an MRI scan and retinal photographs.

This first study of the data confirmed a link between even mild levels of sleep disordered breathing and a minor reduction in memory and concentration in older adults. Up to 25% of women and 36% of men had moderate to severe sleep disordered breathing, with only around 7% reporting significant daytime sleepiness.

Monash adjunct senior lecturer, Dr Stephanie Ward, who is also the consultant geriatrician on the ABC hit series 'Old People's Home for Four Year Olds', led the ASPREE SNORE-ASA study. She said that sleep was an important mechanism for the

body to clear toxins from the brain.

"Sleep disordered breathing is an extremely common condition in older adults. It may leave some people to feel a bit woolly-minded the next day, but for most people there are no obvious symptoms at all," said Dr Ward.

"The full impact of sleep disordered breathing on health in older age is yet to be fully established. Further analysis of ASPREE SNORE-ASA study data will determine whether sleep disordered breathing affects memory and thinking and brain structure over the longer term."

Researchers sent letters to GPs of SNORE-ASA study participants observed to have sleep disordered breathing, to follow up care. Sleep disordered breathing (causing symptoms) can be treated.

### Did you know?

If at any time you find attending a study visit too difficult, please contact our friendly ASPREE team on 1800 728 745.

Our team will always work around your needs at the time.

For instance, ASPREE participants with dementia often like to bring

a study 'buddy' to the visit so they may continue contributing to dementia research.

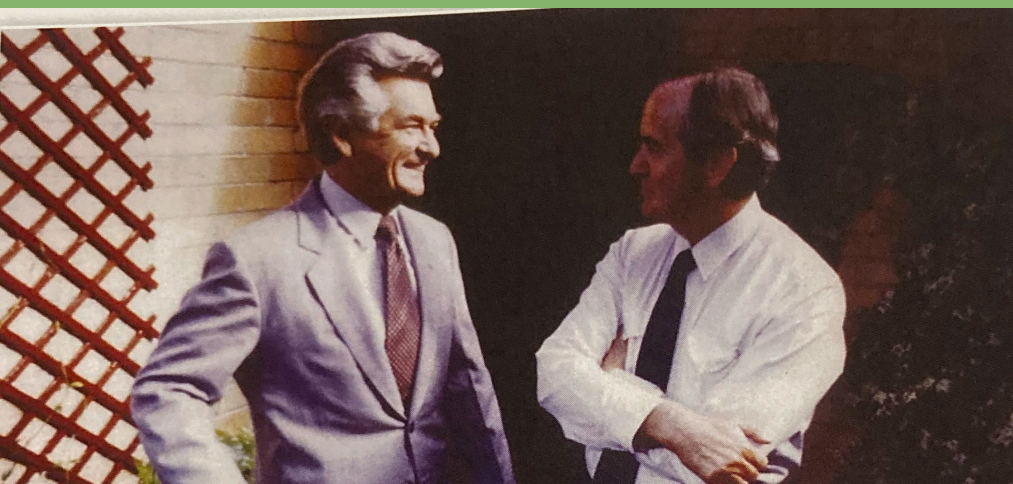
Everyone's contribution to the ASPREE-XT study very much matters.

We cannot replace participants in this study.

### A Special Note



Above: Dr Stephanie Ward led the ASPREE sub-study, SNORE-ASA.



## Capturing moments in history

ASPREE-X participant John Dunn, took three detours off the main highway to Queensland earlier this year. He'll do likewise on his return to Melbourne.

For this veteran journalist, chasing stories are all in day's work. He's been doing it since his cadetship at the 'Horsham Times' almost 75 years ago, armed back then, with a pencil, notebook and a second-hand Malvern Star.



Top: John with Prime Minister Bob Hawke.  
Above: John in front of Time covers during the Whitlam dismissal.  
Photos supplied by John Dunn.

After joining the ASPREE study in 2011, John, now 90, slots study visits around storytelling. And he has no intention of stopping either pursuit.

"I'm very keen to be involved in this research. If that means being able to contribute to the results of a large study in older people, I'm happy to be a participant," he says.

"I enjoy the interactions with the ASPREE study team, but I mostly enjoy contributing to a study that determines healthier aspects of life for us all."

Throughout his career, John has covered and immortalised key moments in the nation's history - from Whitlam's dismissal to winning the America's Cup in Fremantle.

He spent 30 years as a Foreign Correspondent for US 'Time' magazine, which included a 1984 political tour of Japan, South Korea, China and Hong Kong with Prime Minister Bob Hawke, who "didn't pull his punches."

He had daily pressers with Richie Benaud during the 1961 Australian Cricket team tour of England and spent a week reporting in North

Korea, shadowed by guards at his every waking (and sleeping) moment.

"I enjoy the interactions with the ASPREE study team, but I mostly enjoy contributing to a study that determines healthier aspects of life for us all"

Twenty-four years ago, John swapped 'Time' for 'Outback' magazine, writing about perhaps less famed, but no less extraordinary, places and people in rural and remote Australia.

"I went to Borroloola, in the Northern Territory where the road reaches the Gulf of Carpentaria and ends," he says.

"And where two mounted police rode into town one morning to restore order and had their first case in the afternoon, the theft of two horses—theirs!"

John doesn't venture as deep into the outback nowadays. It's the detours, sometimes off the beaten track, where he captures quintessential Australia forever in print.

### BIOBANK TRAVELLING WELL

Sincere thanks to more than 1000 ASPREE-X participants across Greater Melbourne who have generously donated biospecimens (blood and urine samples) in 2022 for future research.

Members of our Biobank team have also hit the road, collecting samples from participants in regional Victorian areas. We are working towards including participants in Adelaide, Canberra and Tasmania in the near future.

### ASPREE-X 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-X 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

staying in touch with you is very important

- Have you moved?
- Have a new GP?
- A change in circumstance?
- Please let us know!



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The ASPREE office operates weekdays 9am - 5pm. If you leave a message, we will return your call.