



Memory and Ageing Study Newsletter – October 2009

This is a newsletter to update you on the progress of the study and advise you of some interesting news and coming events. We hope that this newsletter finds you all well.

It is over four years since the *Memory & Ageing Study* began. The study is designed to find out what predicts successful ageing and what predicts decline in thinking (or cognitive) abilities.

Over a thousand people aged 70 to 90 years in the Eastern Suburbs located through the electoral rolls joined the study and most of you agreed to a telephone call after one year and to being re-interviewed in person two years later. You were very generous with your time, nearly all of you agreed to have blood tests and over half of you agreed to have an MRI scan of your brain.

We collected over 1,000 pieces of data for every single person who participated, generating over a million pieces of data for us to analyse. All the data were entered onto computers and then re-entered to check for any inconsistencies and to make sure that we had recorded everything accurately. We are now repeating the exercise with the two year information you provided to us.

What have we learnt?

We learnt that while almost everybody in this age group has a complaint about their memory this does not predict problems with memory on detailed testing. We are now looking to see whether the memory complaints have any relationship to MRI scans. More importantly, once the two year interviews are finalised we will be able to see what predicts people maintaining their thinking abilities or having a decline.

Scientists are very keen to be able to identify people who are at risk of cognitive decline or of developing a dementia such as Alzheimer's disease. A syndrome called Mild Cognitive Impairment, characterised by subjective memory complaints and objective impairment on testing has been described but its definition is controversial. In the *Memory and Ageing Study*, rates vary between 1.5 and 55.8% of the older population, depending on how the criteria are defined.

Why is this important?

This is important because an accurate definition of people predicted to experience decline will help in testing preventative treatments. Several treatments that have been tried in people with Mild Cognitive Impairment have failed to show a benefit, possibly because of lack of accuracy in identifying people who are at risk of further decline.

Where to next?

We are about to start the third wave of assessments. I am pleased to say this will be much shorter than the previous two assessments and will not require any blood tests or MRI scans. I hope you will continue with us on this journey of discovery. Whatever help you can provide is appreciated.

I would like to thank all our participants and the people who provided information on their behalf and our Research Team.

On behalf of us all at the *Memory and Ageing Study*, I wish you all the best for the Festive Season and the New Year.

Yours,

Henry Brodaty

PROJECT NEWS

Our progress to date

Over 800 participants have been re-interviewed for the follow-up assessment two years after the initial interview. In December 2009 we will have completed the two year follow-up. We will then be able to compare the data of the two assessments and to examine the relationship between cognition and ageing.

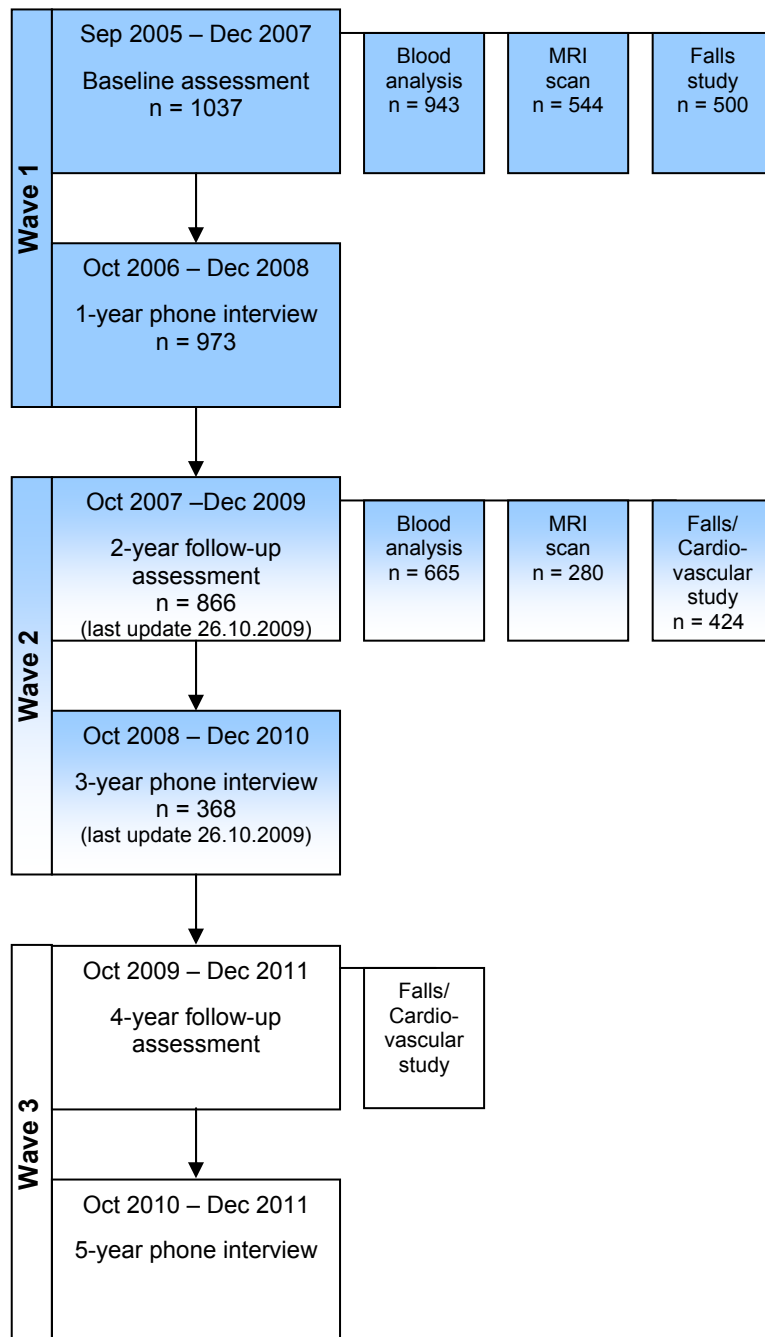
In addition to the face-to-face assessment with our participants we have also interviewed over 800 informants and can gain important information about the effect of possible cognitive decline to caregivers or relatives.

Wave 3 starts in October

The importance and significance of our research program has recently been acknowledged by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) with a grant of \$ 6.1 million to continue our research in the years 2010 – 2015. We will start wave 3 with the 4-year follow-up assessment in October 2009. **This assessment will be shorter than previous and it won't include blood collection and MRI scans.**

As usual, you can either come to the study centre or we will come to your home to conduct the assessment. We are grateful to get as much information as possible, however, if you want to do only a limited assessment just let us know and we will meet your wishes. There is also an option of splitting the assessment into 2 shorter sessions.

Flowchart of the Memory and Ageing study progress:

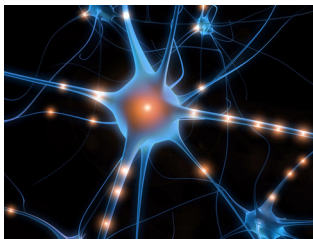
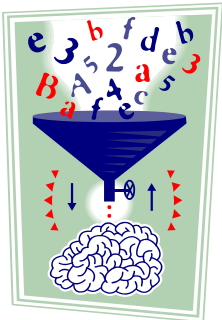


Do you want to come back?

Some of you decided to withdraw from the study due to bad health or because of too many other commitments. If you now want to continue your participation, please call us at 9385 0435.

Train your brain

Brain training is becoming increasingly popular and there are many products promoting themselves as ways to restore and improve brain function. The adult brain continues to change and develop across the life span. This dynamic capacity of the brain to change in response to stimulation is termed *neural plasticity*. In particular, neural plasticity refers to physical changes that occur to your brain cells – and the connections between them – in order for the brain to learn and process new information. For optimal neural plasticity and brain development, we need to stay mentally stimulated and active.



Do brain exercises work?

No brain training product or package has been scientifically shown to reduce the development of dementia. However, some scientific studies have shown benefits when combining exercises that target mental speed, attention, memory and problem solving. In general, these improve performance on the trained task, and may help maintain mental function in older persons.

Are there other options for brain stimulation besides Brain Training products?

Yes. Research indicates that participation in leisure activities with a mental, social and physical component can keep our brain healthy and reduce our risk for dementia.

Trying something new is very stimulating for the brain, particularly if it means learning new information and skills and involves ongoing practice.

Examples of activities with a mental, social and physical component include learning to dance or Tai-Chi, learning a new language or learning bridge, chess and other strategic games.

Call for participants:

The Sydney Centenarian Study

At the University of New South Wales and the Prince of Wales Hospital we are studying the health of people aged 95 years and above. The goal of our research is to better understand the physical and mental health of people in this category to assist health care providers in supplying the right information to people in this group.

We would like to assess any individual aged 95 years and above. It does not matter if the person has trouble with their memory, hearing or vision, or cannot get around easily; we are interested in understanding a whole range of abilities or problems in this age group. It also does not matter if the person is living in their home or in a nursing home. There is no travel involved as we will come to wherever they reside and interviews can be limited to as little as half an hour.

If someone you know is in this age group and would like to participate, please contact **Dr Charlene Levitan on 9385 0431**.

An Invitation to our Brain & Ageing information day

We are pleased to announce that we will be hosting an information afternoon on Saturday, February 6, 2010.



All participants and informants are invited to attend, along with any interested family members or friends and we look forward to seeing you there.

The program will cover research from the Memory and Ageing Study as well as research in related areas such as strokes, falls and twin research. It is the perfect opportunity for you to meet the staff involved in the project as well as other participants in the study. We will be pleased to answer any questions you may have about the project or related research. Afternoon tea will be provided. Further details will be sent to you in a separate invitation.

Brain & Ageing Program Information Day

**When: Saturday, 6 February 2010
1:00pm – 4:00pm**

**Where: Sir John Clancy Auditorium
University of New South Wales**



The MAS Research Assistants:

Carine Pose, Wiebke Queisser, Emma Fox, Joula Dekker, Therese French, Sam Meeth (from left to right).

Congratulations

Professor Perminder Sachdev, the first chief investigator of the Memory and Ageing study, has been appointed Scientia Professor from 2009 until 2014. He received this appointment in recognition of his outstanding contributions to research in neuropsychiatry.

He is a leading academic and research psychiatrist in Australia and recognised internationally for his research expertise in neuropsychiatry.



Professor Henry Brodaty, the second chief investigator of the Memory and Ageing study, has been honoured with a major international award for his services to the field of psychogeriatrics. He was selected to receive the 2009

Distinguished Service to the Field of Psychogeriatrics Award for his work over many years to improve the mental health of older people around



the world. The board of directors of the International Psychogeriatric Association (IPA) says recipients of the award demonstrate inspiration, leadership, vision, ethics, innovation, organisational development and motivation in the discipline of psychogeriatrics.

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