

# WA Centre for Health & Ageing Research News

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[www.wacha.org.au](http://www.wacha.org.au)

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## World-first trial proves exercise helps memory

In a world-first, WACHA researchers have shown that regular physical activity can lead to a lasting improvement in memory function. The WA-based trial results have been published in the prestigious *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

WACHA Director Professor Leon Flicker said people over the age of 50 could pro-actively prevent memory deterioration by doing exercise each day. "What our trial tells us is that older people who take up some form of aerobic exercise for as little as 30 minutes a day will be more likely to remember things like shopping lists, family birthdays and friend's names," he said. "What's interesting about this study is that physical activity doesn't just have benefits for memory and preventing Alzheimer's disease, it highlights the importance of exercise to boost overall wellbeing and mental health," Professor Flicker said.

We all know that exercise can help ward off physical conditions like heart disease and obesity and assist in overall wellbeing and fitness but this study adds another compelling reason to that list.

Today, almost 190,000 Australians live with dementia, a number that is expected to increase with an ageing population, and one in four of people over the age of 85 have moderate to severe dementia. During the trial, 170 volunteers aged 50 years and over were divided into two groups, a control and a group which undertook to achieve 150 minutes of activity each week,



ranging from walking, ballroom dancing to swimming, for a six month period. Participant cognition was tested during intervals over an 18 month period – those who took part in physical activity continually out-scored the control group, which actually reported an overall decline in cognition. West Australian health experts are urging older people to get active after proving for the first time that just 30 minutes of activity each day can prevent memory deterioration. WAIMR director Professor Peter Klinken praised Professor Flicker's team and said the trial was a great example of how medical research could have a positive effect in the community. "This trial really shows us how medical research can offer benefits to the WA community right now as well as future generations, and I'd urge all older West Australians to take note of these important findings." he said.

## Delivering healthier futures to Perth's community

Researchers at WACHA have been delivering health messages to Perth's community. Giving practical tips based on research evidence on how to prolong health and ensure that everyone can enjoy an active and independent life for as long as possible. WACHA's Director, Professor Flicker was joined by Dr Hannah Seymour, the clinical lead for the Falls Prevention Network and

Ms Hayley Erickson a dietician from the Cancer Council WA, to deliver a lecture that formed part of Stay On Your Feet® Week celebrations. The lecture proved extremely popular. The Centre intends to continue running these events in 2009. The information provided at these lectures is available on the WACHA website Resource page, visit [www.wacha.org.au](http://www.wacha.org.au)

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# From the Director's pen

This past year has been full of engaging moments for all of us at the WACHA. I will begin by thanking all the staff, collaborators and Board members for their tremendous commitment, continued innovation, and skilful leadership. I am pleased to welcome 3 new staff members: Kerri Schoenauer, Jo Sleeman and Barbara Bangay. We congratulate Dr Roger Clarnette on the completion of his PhD thesis. Finally, warm greetings to the many new research volunteers that have joined us, and who are participating in our research programs.

In 2008 we launched our professional and community lecture series. Through these lectures we have been able to bring the latest research findings in health and ageing to you. I must also thank Professor Rudi Westendorp, Head of the Leiden University Medical Center in the Netherlands, for his insightful lecture entitled, "Playing the longevity game: the evidence behind increasing lifespan and healthspan". If you missed this lecture it is available via podcast from our website. Thanks also to our sponsors the Australian and New Zealand Society of Geriatric Medicine (WA Branch) for their contribution to this event.

I recently attended the International Conference on Alzheimer's disease in Chicago and was delighted that the Fitness for the Ageing Brain Study exercise study led by Professor Nicola Lautenschlager was chosen to be highlighted at this conference. I was delighted to be there to celebrate this study's accomplishments. This study's results were a world first and have received attention from near and far.

In closing, I would like to share some of my aspirations for the months ahead. WACHA continues to be a leader in health and ageing research. We continue to develop partnerships, research agendas and educational programs in health and ageing. Our goal is to continue to foster relationships with the community in order to promote a better quality of life for older people. I would like to thank you for your continued support, suggestions and encouragement.

Wishing you a Healthy and Happy Holiday Season!



Professor Leon Flicker



Dr Westendorp, Dr Donaldson and Professor Flicker



Dr Wilson, Dr Maher and Nicki Newton

## How many medications are you taking?



In an effort to investigate the effects of taking too many medications, WACHA researchers are conducting a study that will investigate the benefits of medication withdrawal.

The Systematic termination of pharmaceutical agents trial (STOPAT) is a pilot randomised trial of medication withdrawal funded by Royal Perth Hospital and the Medical Research Foundation. Geriatrician, Clinical Pharmacologist and WACHA Principal Investigator Dr Christopher Beer said many doctors are concerned that

patients are taking therapy which may be ineffective, no longer required, producing side effects or be having a detrimental effect on quality of life.

Up to 25% of all acute medical admissions to hospital are due to a clinical problem related to drug treatment. Dr Beer said analysis of individual patient's medications often reveals that some drugs are thought to be unnecessary either because the indication for them no longer exists or because they were carelessly prescribed in the first place. "It has been shown that withdrawal of some drugs can alleviate a tendency to fall in elderly patients, and there is evidence that antihypertensive medication may sometimes be reduced without loss of antihypertensive effect." The STOPAT trial will involve tapering or withdrawal of target drugs and the follow-up will measure relevant physiological indices of well-being and quality of life.

## An Oldie but a Goodie: Donate your favourite recipe

Help WACHA create a cook book full of your favourite recipes. If you have a recipe that you would like to share with us, send it to us at WACHA (M573) The University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Hwy, Crawley 6009 WA. All recipes received will be placed in a draw to win a prize.

## George gets a memory boost

The initiative to join crucial medical research and face up to the realities of ageing is paying off for West Australian seniors taking part in the promoting healthy ageing with cognitive exercise (PACE) study. This program is lead by Clinical Neuropsychologist and PhD candidate Ms Mandy Vidovich.

George a study participant said joining a research study had been like a form of therapy and that negativity and a battle against the ageing process was a big hurdle for older people. George is one of the many research study volunteers that assist researchers at the WACHA with their work.

The aim of the PACE study is to investigate the benefits of mentally stimulating activity and its potential to prevent cognitive decline and enhance memory and well-being as we move into our senior years. The PACE study involves older adults participating in a series of sessions which have been specifically designed for older adults with mild memory problems. The last group of volunteers are currently being assessed.

If you would like to volunteer for one of our research studies please call Cheryl on 9224 2855 to register your interest alternatively register on line at [www.wacha.org.au](http://www.wacha.org.au)

## New link found between depression, medication and fall injury

The latest results of WACHA research have prompted calls for fall prevention to be a priority in treating older Australians with depression. The study published in the international journal PLoS ONE found that depression and antidepressant medication significantly increases the risk of falling and associated injuries for older people.

The findings show that people who are 60 years or older with depression or taking antidepressants are 50 per cent more likely to fall than people without symptoms or medication. The paper reports that older people with any degree of depression are up to 70 per cent more likely to have multiple falls and injury than those without depression.

Research Director, Professor Osvaldo Almeida said "We've found symptoms and medication for depression significantly increases the risk of falls, and

those at highest risk were taking SSRI's, a commonly prescribed antidepressant," he said. "These findings have highlighted how crucial it is that strategies to prevent falls become a routine part of helping older people with depression and part of the process of prescribing medication to treat it."

Every year, up to 35 per cent of older people fall every year and almost a quarter of them need medical attention. Of the 21,900 Australians 60 years and older surveyed, almost a quarter reported at least one fall in the past year, 11 per cent had injured themselves through falling and nearly 10 per cent had needed to see a doctor because of a fall.

We recommend that you consult your GP if you are concerned about falling. Information about fall prevention is available on the WACHA Resource web page.

## A Direct Path to improve Dementia care



Education participants

The Dementia in Residential Care: Education Intervention Trial, DIRECT for short, is addressing the educational and training needs of aged care facility staff and GP's who care for older residents who have dementia. One of the study's aims is to improve the Quality of Life of residents living with dementia.

The Dementia in Residential Care: Education Intervention Trial (DIRECT), is investigating the influence of education for care facility staff and GP's on the quality of life of people with dementia living in residential care facilities. The trial has engaged GPs and residential care facility staff to develop an education strategy that hopes to ultimately improve the quality of life of residents with dementia.

This is the first trial in Australia that will create a dementia education strategy which incorporates feedback directly from those people who will end up using it, and determine the effect of that education on the quality of life of care recipients.

The first phase of the three year trial has been completed; the second phase is currently being rolled out and involves an education package. "So far, we have seen enormous support for the trial. The combined Leaders Education program for GPs and residential care facility staff is proving to be very useful," Principal Investigator, Dr Christopher Beer said. The final phase will be rolled out in 2009.



## Let your true colours shine through

Show your true colours and purchase the limited edition WACHA t-shirt. The t-shirts are available in an array of sizes. Be part of our team.

**On sale now for \$30**

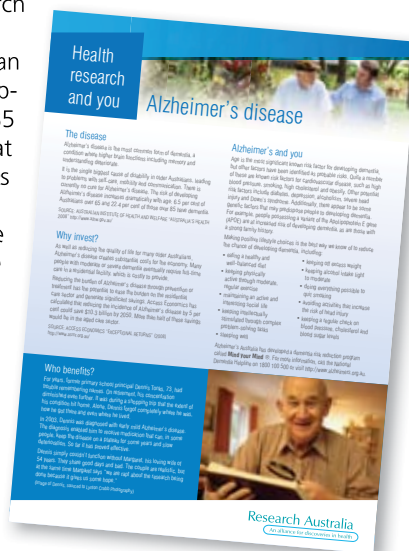
\* Research volunteers are entitled to a 25% discount.

## WACHA and Research Australia partnership creates new Alzheimer's Disease factsheet

WACHA have partnered with Research Australia to produce a new Alzheimer's disease fact sheet that will be distributed nation wide. The fact sheet is designed to be informative and shows the importance of research needed to address the challenges this disease presents. It also highlights the excellent research currently being undertaken in Australia.

With Australia's ageing population comes an increased risk of developing dementia, with approximately one in four people over the age of 85 suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Researchers at WACHA are investigating preventative measures to reduce the risk of cognitive decline.

WACHA Director, Professor Leon Flicker says "We know that cognitive decline can have a huge impact on the lives of people as they age and can lead to serious health problems like Alzheimer's disease and dementia as well as impacting on ones quality of life and mental health." WACHA is delighted to be partnered with Research Australia and supports their mission of making health and medical research a higher national priority. Contact WACHA to obtain your copy of the Alzheimer's disease fact sheet.



## Congratulations Dr Roger Clarnette

Dr Roger Clarnette, Head of Department of Community and Geriatric Medicine at Fremantle Hospital recently completed his PhD under the supervision of WACHA's Research Director Professor Almeida. His thesis titled "Predictors of cognitive decline in those with subjective memory complaint" was completed as part of a National Health and Medical Research Council grant. Dr Clarnette was able to complete his PhD whilst juggling his clinical work.

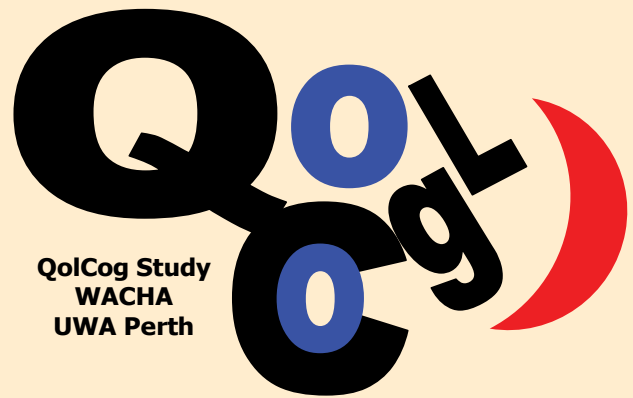
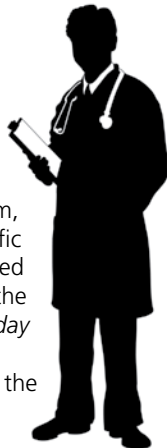
Dr Clarnette said "It was a wonderful experience, everyone should do it". Completing his PhD was an immensely satisfying experience, not only has Dr Clarnette gained personal satisfaction by completing his dissertation but professionally he believes that it has made him a better and more efficient clinician.

Professor Almeida and the WACHA team congratulate Dr Roger Clarnette on this very fine achievement.

## I get by with a little help from the experts

### I'm forgetful, is this a natural part of ageing?

This question and more will be answered by health and ageing experts in our new 5 minutes online audio interviews "Ask an expert" series. Health and ageing experts will pass on their wisdom, advice and information based on the latest scientific findings in a variety of health and ageing related areas. Professor Nicola Lautenschlager launches the series with a discussion on 'Memory: Now, yesterday and tomorrow'. New topics will be added each month to access the series visit [www.wacha.org.au](http://www.wacha.org.au)



## What predicts Quality of Life in Alzheimer's disease?

### The QoLCog study is looking for more volunteers.

Have you been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease?

Are you caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease?

Are you living in the community?

We are seeking to understand how the key factors in dementia, such as forgetfulness, might impact the quality of life of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

For more details about this research, and if you are interested in participating, please contact:

Ms Pascale Bosboom, Clinical Neuropsychologist  
Research Coordinator QoLCog study on 9224 3417.

## Give someone with Dementia a hug this Christmas

Looking for a gift that will make a difference?

A gift that keeps on giving?

For each gift of \$25 or more WACHA will send your friend a greeting card with a personalised hand written message. The money raised will go towards research that supports people with dementia and their carers.

**Make a difference to someone today!**

Contact WACHA on 9224 2993 or email [wacha@uwa.edu.au](mailto:wacha@uwa.edu.au)

Sample personal message

**A gift has been made to support the WA Centre for Health and Ageing**

Dear Terry

Merry Christmas

Wishing you a happy and prosperous 2009! Love Mum

This gift will help our researchers continue their promising work towards supporting people with dementia and their carers.

