

## Over 65s needed for ageing research

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Researchers at the University of Birmingham are trying to recruit 1,000 people over the age of 65 for a series of study projects. The Birmingham 1000 Elders Group, led by Professor Janet Lord, comprises healthy older people from across the West Midlands and the UK who volunteer to help with research into ageing.

The group was launched in the late 1980s and at its peak had more than 3,000 members.

But now the group has only 300 members and Professor Lord, who took over the Elders cohort last year, is looking to recruit a new tranche of volunteers who can help researchers on an ad hoc basis at the University's Centre for Healthy Ageing Research.

Participants may be asked to fill in a questionnaire or help in other ways, such as giving a blood sample. Travel expenses are paid if travel to the University is necessary.



Research taking place on campus

“Professor Lord All research will have been approved by an Ethics committee and any member of the Elders cohort can decline to take part, if they wish,” explained Professor Lord. “The involvement of the group has always been crucial to the research activity of the University and in particular to the work carried out relating to health in older adults.”

The Centre is undertaking a number of studies into ageing at the moment, including:

- Sleep and immunity in old age
- The effect of bereavement on immunity
- Skin and muscle ageing
- Brain ageing

Professor Lord is leading the sleep and immunity study, which is looking at the impact sleep patterns have on health in old age and in particular how it affects our ability to fight infections.

Participants keep a sleep diary and wear an actigraph watch for one week that monitors their sleep. They then give a blood sample so that the researchers can test their immune cell function and when they go for their annual flu jab they take a second blood sample to see how well they respond to the vaccination.

Professor Lord and Dr Anna Phillips are looking at the effect of bereavement on immunity, which is focusing on older adults who have lost someone close to them within the last two months. Participants provide a blood sample, which is checked for immune function and levels of stress hormones. If the study shows that raised stress hormones are related to poor immunity, it may suggest a very simple way to improve health in older adults after a bereavement.

Professor Paul Stewart is heading the skin ageing study, which is investigating the role played by the stress hormone cortisol in skin ageing and in particular finding out whether skin that has been exposed to sunlight more produces more cortisol than skin that is not exposed to sun.

Professor Lord said: “We are incredibly grateful for all the participants who volunteer their time for our research and are very keen to recruit more people who can help us in our studies.”

Anyone interested in taking part should telephone 0121 414 4399 or email [1000elders@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:1000elders@contacts.bham.ac.uk) (<mailto:1000elders@contacts.bham.ac.uk>) for further details.

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