Autonomic activity and its relationship to health and well-being in ageing

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**Why are we doing this study?**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how autonomic nervous system activity (the nervous system that automatically controls bodily functions, such as heartbeat and breathing) changes throughout the normal ageing process, and to see how these changes relate to health and well-being.

**Who can participate in this research?**

- Individuals between 50 and 80 years of age that are generally healthy*;
- No significant medical illnesses*, such as heart conditions or a pacemaker, uncontrolled diabetes, chronic infections, psychotic disorders, primary sleep disorders, or neurodegenerative disorders;
- Have normal or corrected-to-normal hearing and vision;
- Not taking any regular medication for chronic health conditions* (other than low-dose anti-depressants, low dose analgesics, or the oral contraceptive pill), including beta-blockers / anti-hypertensives, corticosteroids, anti-convulsives, benzodiazepines, major analgesics, or other centrally-active drugs.

*If you are interested in the study, but not sure if you’re eligible, please contact us, and we can assess your suitability.

**What is involved?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete a brief screening assessment of your cognitive performance administered by a trained researcher, and eight self-report questionnaires concerning your physical and psychological health, the kind of person you are and some of the stressors in your life. This will take approximately 35 minutes;
- Have your heart rate and breathing measured while you rest for 10 minutes, and during the completion of three computer tasks that assess how quickly and accurately you can respond to a variety of different items, including colours, shapes, numbers, and words. These tasks take 20 minutes in total.
- Wear a portable heart rate monitor overnight in your own home (as shown in the picture to the right). We will organise a courier to collect the device from you on the following day at no cost to you.
- Keep a diary of your sleep and activity for a one-week period.

**Are there costs associated with the study?**

You will not incur any costs as a result of your involvement in this research. You will be reimbursed for your time to the amount of $20.
Are there any risks?

All assessments are non-invasive, however you may feel that some of the questions we ask are stressful or upsetting, or you may feel anxious about performing some of the cognitive tasks. If you do not wish to answer a question, or to continue any task, you may skip it or you may stop immediately. If you become upset or distressed as a result of your participation in the study, the research team will be able to arrange for counselling or other appropriate support free of charge. There is a small risk of developing a rash from wearing the heart rate monitor, however this is highly unlikely. If this does occur, you can contact the research team who can refer you to appropriate medical care.

How can I learn about the outcome of this research?

A summary of our findings will be made available at the conclusion of the study, which we can provide to you via email or post.

How can I sign up for this study?

After reading this brochure you may wish to discuss the study in more detail with Mr Jason Tan. Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your relationship with the University of New South Wales. You may also withdraw from the study once it has started, and can do so at any time without having to give a reason.

If you are interested in participating, please contact:

Jason Tan
Ph: 02 9385 2942
Email: human.behav@unsw.edu.au

Assessments are conducted (by appointment) at:

Department of Human Behaviour (Psychiatry)
Level 1, 30 Botany Street, Randwick (UNSW) 2031

ALL INFORMATION OBTAINED IN THE STUDY WILL BE KEPT STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL (EXCEPT AS REQUIRED BY LAW)

This study has been approved by the UNSW Human Research Ethics Committee

[Approval #: HC15768]