

When longevity rhymes with health and activity

Can we imagine old age and good health being the norm? We're living longer than any previous generation, but how will we spend our older years? Science can help us to partly control our future health by giving us the tools to be proactive and DO-HEALTH is set to deliver practical health advice that can be easily accessed and applied by older people.

LOOKING AT THE BIGGER PICTURE OF HEALTH

Dietary supplements or other life-style choices, such as exercise, are already recommended for the benefit of the whole population. It is hard however to measure their impact, especially for combined treatments. The DO-HEALTH research team wants to look beyond one specific condition or type of treatment and see the combined effects of dietary supplements and exercise. They have designed their project to focus on the 3 types of intervention that have shown the most promising results in previous trials and large cohort studies: vitamin D supplements, omega 3 fatty acids and home exercise.

It's not just about 1+1+1=3; this study can monitor the impact of each intervention individually and the cumulative result of 2 together and all 3 of them. While vitamin D is linked to



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THE FRIGHTENING FACTS:

By 2030 **1 IN 3** people will be over 65. As older age is fundamentally linked to chronic disease, this is imposing **EXPONENTIAL RISES IN COSTS FOR HEALTHCARE SERVICE.** **LONGEVITY** may lead to incapacity, cognitive decline, and low quality of life in some elderly people.

"I've been involved in geriatric research since the early 1990s and this is a historic chance to work together with expert colleagues from across the EU."

"I am so pleased to be able to bring together this great team who are all equally committed to using proven research data to deliver health benefits that everyone can easily choose and commit to."

Professor Heike A. Bischoff-Ferrari,
Director, Centre on Ageing and Mobility,
University of Zurich and City Hospital Waid

Duration: From 1 January 2012
to 30 June 2017

Budget: EUR 13.2 million
(EU contribution EUR 6 million)

Partners/countries

DO-HEALTH project involves 20 partners from 5 EU Member States and 1 Associated Country. A full list is available at www.do-health.eu.

Project website

www.do-health.eu

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building bone and muscle, omega 3 has anti-inflammatory properties. Giving just vitamin D yields positive measurable results and adding omega 3 to this shows additional benefits. This is consolidated by regular exercise.

EU/US COLLABORATION THAT COMBINES THE BEST OF BOTH

DO-HEALTH has a very hands-on approach and recognises that the elderly prefer personal contacts at regular intervals, which also benefits the study as events are reported most accurately. The trial is therefore being set up to follow patients closely and regularly, with yearly follow-up visits and quarterly phone calls between visits. Circumstances can change quickly at this stage of life and researchers in this study will gain a better insight into how health and lifestyle are really evolving. Involving over 2 000 people aged over 70 years old across 5 countries and 7 cities, this is the most comprehensive study to be conducted into ageing and health so far in Europe.

It complements a US study called Vital, which involves a higher number of patients (around 20 000), but is looking more specifically at cancer rates among people over 60. The two combined are certainly a powerful resource, as DO-HEALTH will provide a great overview of lifestyle & functionality among seniors, and it will address key health prevention issues, such as avoiding fractures, improving blood pressure, and maintaining cognitive function.

HARNESSING THE FUTURE TO CHANGE HABITS

Professor Bischoff-Ferrari and her colleagues are very aware of the need to disseminate their results and would like to see local medical centres equipped with interactive computer programmes that can take patients through a range of personalised treatments and likely outcomes.

Prevention in health care is frequently hard to achieve, because people cannot see any pressing need to change their habits. If however they can see changing health scenarios on-screen and can interact with visual models by choosing a combination of supplements and exercises, their own health profile comes alive before their eyes and can be improved with measures that are within their control. Seeing the future 'you' while you can still change it is a more powerful persuader than any theoretical information about old age and quality of life.

A BIG GOAL PUTS 'BEHIND THE SCENES' WORK INTO PERSPECTIVE

Public Private Partnership in DO-HEALTH, with industry funding of EUR 5.3 million, will create a leverage effect in research and innovation. The industry partners see this study as an unmissable opportunity to be part of new developments in a growing market for seniors. Three leading big companies provide expertise and significant investments and they will take advantage of DO-HEALTH findings. The combined commitment will boost their competitiveness in the field of health, healthcare, diagnostics and nutrition.

Professor Bischoff-Ferrari is finding that it's a great combination of experts to work with. Some are valued collaborators from previous projects and working with former colleagues on ambitious new aims is very inspiring.