



Participant Newsletter June 2018

What's new for ELSA Wave 9?

The ninth wave of ELSA is here, and there are some exciting additions since last time:

For wave 9 we are introducing a Nutrition Questionnaire. This online questionnaire has been developed by Oxford University and is successfully used in a number of research studies. The questionnaire collects information on the foods and drinks consumed over the previous day – you will be presented with a number of food items, grouped in categories, and asked to indicate whether you consumed them and, if so, the amount you had.

Gathering more detailed nutritional information will help researchers to establish relationships between diet and different diseases, as well as investigate how income or other circumstances affect nutrition and health.



Moving house or changing your contact details? Please let us know.

You are a valuable and irreplaceable member of ELSA. We are very grateful for your continued support for the study. If you have changed your contact details recently, or have any questions, please let us know by emailing us at elsa@natcen.ac.uk or calling free on **0800 652 4574**.

ELSA around the world

ELSA is part of an international network of studies tracking the experiences of people aged 50 and over around the world. Similar studies are taking place in America, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Scotland and twenty seven other European countries.



There are regular meetings between the teams running the studies to discuss current findings and future developments.

One challenge is designing questions or new elements that are useful for each country but that can also be compared internationally.

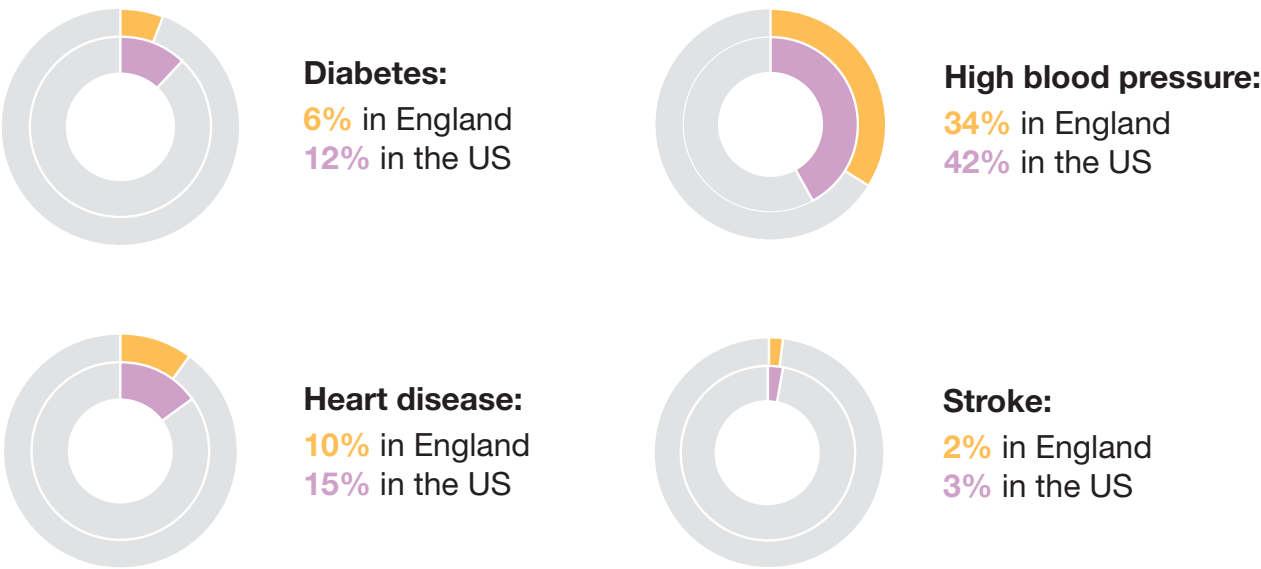
What are your data used for?

The information we collect from you at every wave is used by third sector organisations such as charities or community organisations, researchers and policy makers to better understand the dynamics of ageing in England. The invaluable data informs numerous published research papers which regularly attract media attention and provide evidence to inform policy in key areas related to ageing.

Assessing the incidence of dementia

A paper published last year in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) used ELSA data to assess the incidence of dementia among the English population. The results suggest that, although absolute numbers of people with dementia will increase over the next few decades (largely due to a higher life expectancy), improvements in medicine and appropriate public health efforts could reduce the chance of developing dementia for both men and women. Listen to Dr Sara Ahmadi-Abhari, one of the authors of the paper; discuss it in the BMJ podcast (www.bmj.com/content/358/bmj.j2856). The study was featured in national papers including The Telegraph and The Guardian.

A comparison of the health of 55-64 year olds in England and the US found some differences. People in the US are more likely to have experienced diabetes (12% in the US, 6% in England), high blood pressure (42% compared to 34%), heart disease (15% and 10%) and stroke (3% and 2%) than their English counterparts.



But when it comes to memory, Americans were ahead. A study found that people in the US aged 65 and over tended to have better memories than those in England. This might be because people in the US are more likely to take medication for high blood pressure than in England, which may reduce the development of memory problems.

We live longer than we think

In April this year, the Institute for Fiscal Studies published a paper that looked at the ages that ELSA members said they expected to reach, then compared that to projections of how long those people would live, and then also the ages they actually did survive to.

Your answers helped researchers find out that we tend to underestimate our chances of survival: For example, men born in the 1940s who were interviewed at age 65 reported a 65% chance of making it to age 75, whereas the official estimate was 83%. For women, the equivalent figures were 65% and 89%. We live longer than we think!

The authors argue that our pessimistic survival expectations could be a concern if, as a result, people are not well enough prepared for retirement. For example, recent changes to pension policies now allow people to access some types of pension funds when they reach the age of 55. As more people who have those kinds of pensions reach the age of 55 and are able to access the funds, their expectations about how long they will need those funds to provide for themselves become increasingly important.

ELSA 50+ Memory and Thinking

Over the last few months, we carried out an extra study which looked at how our memory and thinking change as we get older. The Memory and Thinking study asked 1800 ELSA participants aged 65 and over to take part in a series of tasks and activities. The aim was to get a picture of people's memory and thinking across the whole range of ability, from those who will never experience problems with memory right through to people who have been diagnosed with dementia.

Some of the tasks were similar to those used in the main ELSA interview, such as remembering lists of words or filling in the gaps in a series of numbers. Others were brand new, including matching patterns, remembering story details, and recognising smells using scented pens.

The study is part of an international project started by ELSA's sister survey in the United States, the Health and Retirement Study.

Other countries are looking to repeat the study, including Mexico, India, China and Ireland. Results from around the world will help researchers understand more about the causes and impacts of changes in memory and thinking as we age.

Thank you to all who took part!

What participants say about ELSA interviewers and taking part in the study

“ He was very polite, very good at explaining and I enjoyed the interview. ”

“ She is lovely, she has been coming since I started doing it and I feel she is my friend. ”

“ We first met the interviewer 14 years ago and were only going to take part once but the interviewer was so good that we continued to take part. ”

