

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Investigation into how vitamin D affects balance and muscle strength

A University of Tasmania investigation into how the Tasmanian weather impacts on balance and muscle strength is seeking volunteers from northern Tasmania to be part of the study.

UTAS School of Human Life Sciences lecturer Marie-Louise Bird said there was evidence that the types of accidental falls that older people have change with the different seasons.

“The highest rates of limb fractures occur about 10 weeks after the shortest day of the year,” she said.

“Tasmania generally has less winter daylight hours in comparison to other Australian states.

“Sunlight is an important source of vitamin D, with recent research showing that adequate vitamin D levels provide a range of health benefits for people including benefits to strength, balance and fall risk.

“In Tasmania about one third of older adults have lower than optimal levels of vitamin D.”

Ms Bird’s study will investigate whether there are measurable changes in balance in people aged between 60 and 85 at different times of the year and if this is related to either changes in activity level, leg strength or levels of vitamin D.

Study participants from the Launceston region will be required to attend testing five times over a one year period starting in Spring 2009.

Participants will undergo simple tests to measure their balance and strength and a small sample of blood will be taken. Exposure to sunlight will be measured and dietary levels of vitamin D assessed using a food frequency questionnaire. Other general medical information that relates to falls and falling will also be recorded and activity levels measured using a questionnaire.

If you would like to be part of this study, are aged 60-85 and living independently, please contact Ms Marie-Louise Bird by calling 6324 3123, Susannah Torcasio on 6324 5400 or by email to Marie-Louise.Bird@utas.edu.au.

For more details on the study, please call Marie-Louise Bird on 6324 3123.

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