

# Family history to tackle dementia

February 24 2011, By Cath Harris

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A novel way of finding people to take part in a new study of dementia is being employed by researchers from the universities of Oxford and London.

The Oxford Project to Investigate [Memory](#) and Aging (OPTIMA) and the Centre for [Stroke](#) and Dementia Research at St Georges, University of London, will host stands at the *Who Do You Think You Are?* LIVE show, which starts 25 February at Olympia, London, where people interested in their ancestry will be enjoying 'a weekend of discovery.'

The scientists are studying links between written language and dementia and looking for collections of text written by people with and without dementia.

They hope to make copies from diaries, letters, articles and books, written by the same person and ideally spanning three decades, to assess changes in the use of language by an individual and any links with the development of dementia. Changes detected could help diagnose Alzheimer's disease earlier.

"The types of people at the event are likely to be those who would keep records of their family history, family letters or journals," says Dr. Celeste de Jager, Senior Research Associate in Neuropsychology at OPTIMA which is based at Oxford University's Nuffield Department of Clinical Medicine

"We want to interest people in the study because we need another 75 participants, each with a series of texts, to reach our target of 100." Dr. Peter Garrard from St Georges is seeking a further 100 people for the same exercise. All copied text will be kept confidential and anonymous.

"It isn't the handwriting as such that's important but the complexity of the text and use of language," Dr. de Jager says. Deterioration in language is a common feature of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Loss of vocabulary and problems finding the right word are typical symptoms.

Writing samples for the study can be written or typed and must be from people of sixty years or older.

"We will be looking for linguistic changes over time so need the same type of text from each person to have consistency," Dr. de Jager says.

One person in five shows signs of [dementia](#) by the age of 80. Subtle problems may become apparent in spoken and written [language](#) before other symptoms such as memory loss are detected.

Provided by Oxford University

Citation: Family history to tackle dementia (2011, February 24) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-02-family-history-tackle-dementia.html>

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