



Newsletter

Studying Women's Health Across the Nation since 1996

Spring 2010

Updates:

Welcome Back SWAN Participants!

After a brief hiatus, SWAN is back and doing follow-up visits. All sites (Pittsburgh, Chicago, Michigan, Boston, Los Angeles, New Jersey, and Davis, CA) are continuing to see participants.

Why haven't I had my visit yet?

When it comes to scheduling, we may not see you at the same time of year as we did for past visits. This is because we started clinic visits later this year. If you haven't heard from us yet, we will be in touch soon.

What's new this visit?

This year's visit includes several new measures, some of which will be implemented at specific sites. Select measures of physical functioning will be incorporated at all sites and may include a test of grip strength, timing how fast you can walk 40 feet, and timing how fast you can stand up from a seated position. We are also bringing back the memory tests like you did during prior visits.

Most sites are carrying out carotid ultrasound exams. Carotid ultrasound exams will allow us to evaluate your carotid arteries by taking pictures of the inside of your blood vessels. The Mood and Emotional Well-Being Interview, which has previously been conducted in Pittsburgh, is now also being conducted in Boston and has restarted in New Jersey. It asks about past and current mood and anxiety experiences.

Why is SWAN still calling you?

One of the major goals of the grant extension for SWAN is to measure the occurrence of health outcomes, such as diabetes, heart disease, fractures, and depression, which were predicted in earlier years of the study. SWAN will continue to focus on healthy aging.

New Website Launched!

The SWAN website has undergone some stylistic and content-based changes, and it is now easier for the general public, and especially participants and their families, to learn more about SWAN. The main page includes links to an overview of the study and the study results. Additionally, under the Publications link, you will find links to selected publications about SWAN data in both scholarly journals and popular media outlets. Under Resources you'll find articles about aging and the menopause transition from sources outside of SWAN. If your friends and family have ever wondered what you've been participating in over the last 12 years, please share the website link: www.swanstudy.org.

Did you know?

Among SWAN participants, there was a 60% decline in the number of women who started hormone therapy while going through menopause after the release of the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) Report. The WHI reported increased risks of heart attacks and breast cancer among women who used hormone replacement therapy.

Thanks for Coming Back!

We are delighted to be seeing each of you once again in SWAN. A high rate of continued participation is essential to provide information that is reliable and applicable to all women. Thanks to you SWAN is providing valuable and unique information that will help inform current and future women about the issues that women face as they enter and traverse their middle years.

Recent Publications in the News:

"Effects of the menopause transition and hormone use on cognitive performance in midlife women"

Dr. Gail Greendale, Principal Investigator of the UCLA SWAN site, recently published a paper in *Neurology*, describing changes in memory that occur during menopause. The article has been covered by the [New York Times](#), [AARP](#) and [ABC News](#).

As many of you may remember from prior visits, we conducted memory tests, where you had to recall numbers and a story, as well as matching numbers and symbols. In this paper, SWAN investigators found that the tests of memory worsen modestly in the later phases of the menopause transition. The good news is that memory returns to normal once the women have finished the menopause transition. As SWAN progresses, we will try to determine if memory changes as women progress further into their post-menopausal years, and if these changes are simply due to aging of the effects of menopause.

Bone Mineral Density Changes during the Menopause Transition in a Multiethnic Cohort of Women

Most all women lose bone as they age and over 20 million Americans have low bone mass, which leads to approximately 1.5 million fractures each year. SWAN investigators examined the link between bone loss in midlife women and menopause.

Bone density remains stable before the menopause transition and then accelerates in the late stages of the menopause transition, before a woman has stopped menstruating completely. Rapid bone loss continues in the first few years after a woman has stopped having periods.

This study also investigated whether the rates of bone loss vary among different racial and ethnic groups. Rates of bone loss were lowest in African Americans, followed by Caucasians and Asians. Although being overweight has adverse effects on many aspects of women's health, such as an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, and arthritis, being overweight is associated with a slower rate of bone loss.

Hopelessness, Depressive Symptoms, and Carotid Atherosclerosis in Women: The Study of Women's Health Across the Nation (SWAN) Heart Study

The SWAN Heart Study is a sub-study of SWAN at the Pittsburgh and Chicago sites. Recently, by comparing changes found on the ultrasound of the carotid arteries, SWAN investigators found that women who reported higher amounts of hopelessness were more likely to have evidence of vascular disease. In future studies, SWAN will examine the role of menopause and other factors that play a role in the development and progression of vascular disease in women.

Updates at SWAN MGH

Visits at SWAN MGH

This year's visit will take approximately 4 to 5 hours to complete. As in years past, you will have a blood draw, bone density scan, annual follow-up interview, and memory tests. Additionally, this year we will be conducting a mood interview and a carotid ultrasound. To shorten the length of the visit, we will be sending one of the questionnaires to you in the mail. That way you can complete it and bring it with you to your visit. Additionally, you will complete a form mapping significant life events, which will help us with the mood interview. Also, please don't forget to bring in the packaging for all medications, supplements, and over-the-counter drugs that you've taken in the past three months!

Thank you for helping our research here at MGH!

Thanks to your impressive participation over the past 14 years, we have received additional funding from MGH to look at factors in the blood we have drawn from you. Our research involves measuring two factors produced by the ovary, called Inhibin B and MIS. We'll be looking at frozen samples from SWAN participants across the nation to measure these levels. The goal is to see if we can predict when a woman's final menstrual period will occur by examining these levels, as current tests are poor predictors of the menopause. All of this would not be possible without you!

New SWAN Staff at MGH

Both Emily and Sammy joined the SWAN MGH staff this past June. Emily was formerly at Partners Healthcare Information Systems, researching meaningful use of Health Information Technology and electronic medical record systems. She graduated from Williams College in 2008 with a BA in Art History and is currently applying to medical schools and masters programs in public health for matriculation in 2011. Sammy conducts the psychological meas-



New SWAN Staffer Emily



New SWAN Staffer Sammy

ures portion of the visit with participants at the MGH site. She received her Master's degree in clinical research at Dartmouth College in 2008, and worked with the Harvard Stem Cell Institute (HSCI) prior to joining SWAN. At HSCI, Sammy helped to create a tissue repository and set up the kidney pathology program. She was recently accepted to the University of Pittsburgh Ph.D. program in clinical psychology and will be working with the Pittsburgh site while earning her degree.