

The newsletter of the ASCEND Study

Summer 2009 – Number 5

Welcome to the fifth edition of **HIMALAYA** – the newsletter of the ASCEND study. Thank you very much for your interest and participation in the ASCEND study so far. If you have not received **HIMALAYA** before, we hope this newsletter will educate and entertain you, and tell you more about the study that you are playing such a vital role in. If you have, then read on and find out what we have been up to since the last issue.

ASCEND PASSES THE HALFWAY MARK!

There are now over 5,400 people taking part in ASCEND which means we are well past the halfway mark on our way towards our target of 10,000 participants. This means ASCEND is already the largest study of aspirin in people with diabetes and we are very grateful for your help with achieving this. We also have good reason to believe that we might achieve our target of 10,000 volunteers by the end of this year. The picture opposite shows *Makalu* which is the fifth highest mountain in the world at 8,462 metres. Like Everest it stands on the border between Nepal and China and is thought to be one of the most difficult mountains in the world to climb.



WHO ELSE IS TAKING PART?

People from all over the UK are participating in ASCEND. We collect data on everyone who participates and here are some of the characteristics of everyone taking part:

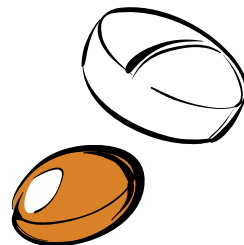
- 60% are male and 40% are female;
- 90% of people have type 2 diabetes;
- the average age is 60 years;

- participants have had diabetes for an average of 11 years before entering the study;
- about 1 in 3 participants take insulin.

As you know we have collected lots of other information about you and will discuss this in future issues of **HIMALAYA**.

WHAT IF I'VE STOPPED MY STUDY TREATMENTS?

If you have been recommended to stop your study treatments by a doctor, then please let us know, if you have not already done so. You may have simply forgotten to take them for a while, in which case it is never too late to restart! Although a gap in treatment is not ideal, it is much better for the study if you were to



restart taking them now rather than not taking them again. Similarly, if you feel you have had some side-effects from the study treatments, we would like to know. If you would like to discuss any of these matters with a study

doctor, then please contact us on the Freephone number below.

Where can people find out more?

They can:



visit the ASCEND website: www.ctsuo.ox.ac.uk/ascend



call a member of the study team: (Freephone) 0800 585323

THE ASCEND TEAM

In each issue of **HIMALAYA** we hope to introduce you to different members of the ASCEND team. In previous issues we have focused on people who work in Oxford. However, there is a vital group of people who work for a company in Hay-on-Wye, Wales who package all the study treatments that you are sent. They receive the tablets from the manufacturers and with a combination of special machinery and a dedicated team of people produce the blister cards, package them up and post them out to you when staff in Oxford request it.



...stop press... RESEARCH UPDATE ...stop press...



The Antithrombotic Treatment Trialists' Collaboration published their latest findings in *The Lancet* at the end of May. This group of researchers is led by Professor Colin Baigent who works in Oxford and consists of the lead researchers on all the major trials involving aspirin (and other blood-thinning medications). The most recent publication focuses on the use of aspirin in *primary prevention* i.e. to see whether aspirin can prevent heart attacks and strokes in people who have not had one before.

The researchers found that although aspirin reduces the risk of heart attacks slightly, this reduction was about equal to the *increased* risk of serious bleeding caused by aspirin. They concluded that "the currently available trial results do not seem to justify general guidelines advocating the routine use of aspirin in all healthy individuals

above a moderate level of risk for coronary heart disease."

We know that people with diabetes are at somewhat higher risk of heart attacks and strokes compared to the general population so it may be that the benefits of aspirin outweigh the risks in people with diabetes. However, there is not enough evidence for this to be clear which is why studies like ASCEND remain very important.

We also shouldn't forget the other half of ASCEND which is the omega-3 fish oils comparison: these oils are probably safe but it is not known if they are effective in people with diabetes who have not had a heart attack. ASCEND will therefore answer not one but two very important questions for people with diabetes. If either or both treatments are shown to be safe and effective then the results could help thousands of people with diabetes live longer, healthier lives.

HOW CAN I MAKE ASCEND A SUCCESS?



You have a major role to play in helping ASCEND provide a clear answer about aspirin and fish oils in people with diabetes. Firstly, please complete the follow-up questionnaires we send every six months. It is vital that we know what happens to you (even if you're not taking study treatment) to ensure the answer ASCEND gives is not biased in any way.

Secondly, please take your study treatments! If you have been told to stop either treatment (or been put on aspirin or drugs such as warfarin or clopidogrel), please call 0800 585323 to let us know (if you haven't done so already). Finally, tell anyone else you know with diabetes about the study and help us reach our target of 10,000 people!

