

HEALTHY LIVING:

**Eye disease and cognitive problems, statins and stroke, computer programs help people quit smoking**

Scientists are studying possible links between eye disease and cognitive problems in seniors.

A group of Australian researchers evaluated 2,000 seniors, giving them several cognitive tests and checking for the age-related eye condition macular degeneration. They found those who scored lowest on one cognitive test involving thinking and learning were twice as likely to have early stage macular degeneration.

There was no link, however, between macular degeneration and dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

A new study finds taking cholesterol lowering statins after a stroke can reduce the risk of a second stroke.

Greek researchers followed 800 stroke patients for 10 years. About eight percent of those taking statins had a second stroke, compared to 16 percent of those not taking statins.

Face to face counseling often gets the best results when it comes to helping people kick the smoking habit, but it doesn't come cheap.

Now, a new study finds computer or Web-based programs, which are often free, are worth a try.

Researchers found 9.9 percent of smokers who used a computer program were still smoke-free after one year. That's higher than those who quit on their own.

Experts say some smokers may even prefer computer programs because of their privacy and flexibility.

# Australia lists Tasmanian devils as endangered

**CANBERRA, Australia - The Tasmanian devil, a snarling fox-sized marsupial made notorious by its Looney Tunes cartoon namesake Taz, was listed in Australia as an endangered species Friday because of a contagious cancer that has wiped out most of the wild population.**

The upgrade from "vulnerable" under Australian environmental law entitles the world's largest marsupial carnivore to greater protection in the island state of Tasmania, Environment Minister Peter Garrett said in a statement.

Devils do not exist in the wild outside Tasmania, although mainland zoos are breeding captive populations as a strategy against total extinction.

Their numbers have declined by 70 percent since the facial cancer was first reported in 1996. The disease is caused by bites inflicted on each other's faces as part of a bizarre mating ritual or while squabbling over food. It causes grotesque facial tumors that eventually prevent them from feeding, leading to starvation within months.

"Strong action is being taken to find out more about this disease and to stop its spread," Garrett said.

The government has already committed 10 million Australian dollars (\$7.8 million) over five years to research the disease and support captive breeding programs, but scientists



say more is needed.

### Looking for funding

Hamish McCallum, senior scientist in the government-backed devil rescue program, said the main advantage of the endangered listing was that it acknowledged the serious threat the species faced.

"I'm hoping that it might cause a philanthropist or corporate sponsors to say: 'Hey, this is serious' and to chip in some serious money," McCallum said.

"I guess my optimism has diminished a little bit, but I'm still hopeful that of the various angles we're looking at, one of them will come through and we won't lose the animals in the wild," he added.

Warner Bros., which owns Taz, and

CNN founder Ted Turner, who started the Cartoon Network, have helped fund the fight against the disease.

McCallum fears that devils could be extinct in the wild in 20 years. He estimates there are as few as 10,000 now, as the cancer continues to spread west and south across Tasmania.

Scientists have been working since the disease first emerged to save the animals, known for their powerful jaws and bloodcurdling growl.

### Finding sanctuaries

Programs to try to save them include plans to relocate breeding pairs to island sanctuaries and to protect disease-free populations on peninsulas with devil-proof fences several miles long.

McCallum said he is frustrated that disagreement among scientists has prevented the sanctuaries from being established on islands off Tasmania. Some scientists fear the introduced devils would threaten endangered birds.

Scientists had hoped to find a genetic solution to the disease through a young devil who showed signs of natural immunity in laboratory tests. But that devil last year contracted a second, mutated strain of the cancer.

A test that can potentially detect the disease in a devil before it becomes contagious is in trials. While scientists hope this will help keep small wild populations disease free, the test is not yet proven to be accurate.

# Brumby praises book on Vietnam veterans

Victorian Premier, John Brumby, with Greek Australian Vietnam veterans

The Premier of Victoria, John Brumby met with a group of Greek Australian Vietnam veterans on Thursday and was presented with Greek Australians in the Vietnam War, a book prepared by Vietnam veteran Steve Kyritsis.

The book is a compilation of oral histories in Greek and in English, from over 30 veterans of Greek background who served in Vietnam. 128 Greek Australians in total served in the Vietnam War between 1962 and 1972.

"It took me over four years to bring together, it was not easy to get the veterans to join in," said Mr Kyritsis.

He thanked the veterans for taking part in the book and expressed his gratitude towards George Lekakis the Chairperson of the Victorian Multicultural Commission who supported the project, and added, "We are proud as Greeks to have served in the Australian Defence Force."

While many veterans were conscripted Mr Kyritsis underscored that others enlisted and were career soldiers like Peter Diamond, who saw 20 years service in the Australian Army.

"I served twice in Vietnam in 1965 and 1970. It does not matter if you are conscript or a regular soldier in Vietnam. We were all doing our duty," added

Mr Kyritsis.

Mr Kyritsis concluded by saying, "If there is one good thing that came out of the Vietnam War, it was the friendships. We were mates and we will always be mates."

The Premier was visibly moved in his reply, "My father saw service in the WWII and he kept up with all his mates right through. This book will strengthen the friendships and bonds you have established as brothers in arms," said the Premier.

Mr Brumby said, "I think the history of the Vietnam War is an important one to document, we



Victorian Premier, John Brumby, with Greek Australian Vietnam veterans

have not had a book like this one before. The fact that this has been written in Greek and in English is such a unifying thing."

He pointed to the bitter debate over the war "back home" and the fact that veterans came back to face hostility. "It was not that easy for our veterans when they came home."

The Premier suggested that "by tackling the history and relating it to the real people like those surveyed here which is all of you," is a way of dealing with a past. "I think this is such an important contribution to our history, and you fought for our freedoms," Premier Brumby said highlighting, "The Greek community's sense of pride, it is a proud community."

"I was recently with the community on Greek National Day at the Shrine of Remembrance where thousands of Greek Australians marched to commemorate the struggle for freedom."

The head of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, George Lekakis, said, "When Steve (Kyritsis) came to me I thought of my father as a soldier in the Greek Army during WWII and the importance of recognising the contribution of these Greek Australians."

"It is a great book with gripping stories. Some are very raw and with honest feelings. It is an excellent primary historical source" added Mr Lekakis.