



Don't worry and live longer, study shows

By DANIELLE TEUTSCH

HAVING a laid-back attitude to life can help you live to be 100, researchers have found.

A new Australian study has found centenarians seem to have a special ability to cope with stress, and move on from dramatic life events with a minimum of angst.

The study, presented yesterday at the second International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity held in Brisbane, is the first in Australia to look at what makes up a centenarian personality.

Flinders University senior lecturer in nursing Charmaine Power said the research team was struck by the fact that most of the 24 centenarians from around the country interviewed for the study had no sense their lives had been "stressful".

"Yet some had been to war, or had been left alone with small children while their husbands went off to war. They had lived through the Great Depression. Their children

had died," Dr Power said.

"That's what we would call major, major stresses."

The findings bolster 1999 research by two Harvard academics, which noted centenarians were good at dealing with emotional stress, calling them "stress shedders".

"It's not about avoiding stress," Dr Power said.

"It's more about how people respond to stress that is key. They are people who don't dwell on the past. They just get on with it, basically."

Other traits common to the centenarians in the study were a sense of humour, a strong work ethic, engaging personality and deep religious beliefs.

"They drew you in and engaged you in their lives - we loved being with them," Dr Power said.

"And they were doers. They were not people who spent a lot of time sitting around."

Prising the secrets of longevity

from the exclusive club of centenarians is an area of increasing interest to scientists.

The number of centenarians around the world is projected to increase to 2.2 million by 2050. In 1999, there were 145,000.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics said there were more than 3000 centenarians in Australia in 2001, a dramatic increase from the 1970s when there were only about 250.

A more practical way to add to life expectancy is by quitting smoking immediately and making sure you have a daily tippie, said University of Western Sydney dean of social and health sciences John McCallum.

Professor McCallum presented the latest results from an ongoing study of elderly Dubbo residents at the conference, showing smoking cut 22 months from men's lives, and 15 months from women's lives.

Being a teetotaler was almost as detrimental, shortening life spans of men by nine months, and of women by five months.