

Hearing Loss and Dementia

What you need to know!

Adults with hearing loss are much more likely to develop problems thinking and remembering than adults with normal hearing. Over a six year period, adults with untreated hearing loss suffered 30% to 40% faster decline in cognitive function. These findings were published January 25, 2013 in the JAMA Internal Medicine. Taking into account variables such as age, high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke, they suggest three theories to explain the link between hearing loss and dementia

Social Isolation

Social isolation was previously shown to be a risk factor for Alzheimer's disease. Professor Cacioppo at the University of Chicago showed that simply feeling lonely may have a greater effect than actual objective isolation on your health. We are social animals and need human interaction to live longer.

Cognitive Load

Cognitive load, but it is probably more correct to call it cognitive overload. Hard of hearing listeners use energy from other portions of the brain trying to understand and translate sounds. This depletes brain power needed in other portions of brain. For example, there is less energy for short term memory because of the extra cognitive load to hear and understand speech.

Pathological link between hearing loss and dementia

There is rising evidence that there may be a genetic link between hearing loss and dementia. Hearing loss could lead to dementia, or the other way around. The early stages of dementia may have an effect on hearing ability.

By treating hearing loss early, which decreases isolation and cognitive load, we may also help prevent cognitive decline.



You need to stop mumbling. Speak-up!

Actor Charlton Heston, actor and former President Ronald Reagan, and more recently, women's basketball coach at the University of Tennessee Pat Summit, were diagnosed with dementia. Hearing loss not only compounds the symptoms of Alzheimer's and Dementia, but may also be an important risk factor. Here are four reasons why maintaining good hearing is important for maintaining a healthy mind.

1. Some cases of Alzheimer's and Dementia are made worse by hearing loss. A 1986 study showed that 83% of 30 of the patients diagnosed with senile dementia also had a significant hearing loss. 33% of those were reclassified to a less severe category of dementia once their hearing loss was corrected.
2. Uncorrected hearing loss leads to depression, which is also associated with Alzheimer's. A Dutch study found that Alzheimers was 2.5 times more likely in people with a history of depression. Hearing loss caused listeners to withdraw socially which lead to depression and anxiety. The National Council of Aging published a study that showed listeners who corrected their hearing loss showed significant improvements in relationships at home, feelings of self worth, and mental health.
3. Improved hearing provides significant stimulation to the brain. A hearing loss isolates the listener from their environment. Corrected hearing stimulates the brain and helps us comprehend the world around us. Like doing crossword puzzles, just conversing with someone stimulates vital sections of the brain.
4. Uncorrected hearing loss can make Alzheimer's and Dementia worse. Even if you already have symptoms of Alzheimer's or Dementia, correcting for hearing loss decreases the effects of memory loss. A 1999 study showed that testing and correcting hearing loss in Alzheimer's patients could be done effectively. The study showed that there was a significant improvement in everyday communication. **This improvement in hearing resulted in a decreased burden on caregivers.**

So the message today is that if you are concerned about memory problems, it's time to have your hearing tested. If you or someone you know is having difficulty with their hearing or memory, schedule a hearing test with an audiologist. Hearing testing is painless and most insurance companies will pay for all of the examination done by an audiologist. And if it is nothing more than a hearing problem, the audiologist can help you to hear and understand better.



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