

# The Connection Between Hearing Loss and Overall Health: What You Should Know

Hearing loss is more than just an annoying inconvenience – it can have profound effects on your overall health and wellbeing. With hearing loss being one of the most prevalent chronic conditions worldwide, affecting over 430 million people, it's important to understand the impacts it can have if left untreated. This article explores the key connections between hearing health and overall wellbeing, including tips on how hearing aids can help.



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## The Link Between Hearing Loss and Dementia

One of the most concerning correlations is the relationship between untreated hearing loss and cognitive decline. Studies have shown that individuals with untreated hearing loss are more likely to develop dementia and experience faster rates of

cognitive decline over time compared to those without hearing loss.

Research suggests hearing loss can increase dementia risk by contributing to social isolation, brain changes, and higher cognitive load. As hearing worsens, people withdraw from social situations leading to loneliness. Straining to hear places more demands on the brain, essentially overworking it. Detecting and interpreting sounds also becomes more difficult, exhausting cognitive resources.

### **Hearing Loss Impacts Mental Health**

In addition to cognitive impacts, untreated hearing loss is linked to an increased risk of depression, anxiety and emotional turmoil. This is often because hearing loss can lead to:

- Social isolation and loneliness
- Relationship difficulties due to miscommunication
- Loss of independence and engagement in activities
- Embarrassment or stigma over needing to ask people to repeat themselves

These effects on mental health underline how essential it is for those experiencing hearing decline to seek help early. Getting hearing loss treated improves communication, social participation, independence and overall quality of life.

### **The Risks of Poor Cardiovascular Health**

Emerging research indicates that untreated hearing loss can negatively impact heart health. One large study found hearing

loss was associated with a higher risk of hospitalization for cardiovascular reasons.

This is thought to be related to the effects hearing loss has on promoting social isolation, stress and depression – all factors connected to poorer cardiovascular health. Additionally, constantly straining to hear can trigger the body's stress response, increasing blood pressure.

Looking after both your hearing and cardiovascular health go hand-in-hand.

### **Links to Falls and Physical Health**

Hearing loss poses risks to overall physical health and mobility, particularly in older adults. Damaged hearing can impair balance and spatial awareness – two capacities necessary to avoid falls.

Studies demonstrate that those with untreated hearing loss have a greater risk of falls compared to those without hearing impairments. Falls are a major source of hospital visits, injury, disability and reduced independence for older adults.

Wearing hearing aids helps improve awareness of one's surroundings and balance, reducing fall risk. Routine hearing checks and promptly addressing loss are key steps for staying physically active and independent.

### **Hearing Health as You Age**

It's natural for hearing decline to occur as we age, usually from age 50 onwards. Age-related hearing loss arises due to factors like:

- Wear and tear on the delicate inner ear structures
- Loss of hair cells in the inner ear

- Changes in the auditory nerves

While many view deteriorating hearing as an inevitable nuisance, it's vital older adults don't dismiss it. Seeking early assistance preserves cognitive abilities, social life, independence and safety.

Around one third of people over 50 have some degree of hearing loss. But amongst those over 70, it rises dramatically to almost two thirds displaying measurable hearing decline. Unfortunately, many delay getting help for years due to the slow gradual nature of age-related hearing loss.

If those around you suggest you may be having trouble hearing, it's wise to get a professional assessment rather than shrugging it off. The earlier hearing loss is addressed, the better the outcomes.

### **Protecting Your Hearing**

While some degree of age-related decline is expected, there are preventative steps you can take to protect your hearing and minimize loss:

- Avoid excessive noise exposure from loud music, machinery, etc which can damage delicate inner ear structures.
- Use earplugs when necessary for noisy activities. Have custom fitted plugs made for prolonged exposures.
- Address hearing loss as soon as you notice any changes or others point them out. Early intervention is key.
- Get regular hearing check-ups from your 50s onward so

any changes can be caught early.

- Choose hearing aids as soon as they are recommended and wear them consistently.
- Follow healthy lifestyle habits – exercise, a balanced diet and cognitive stimulation aid hearing.
- Take medications only as prescribed and watch for potential ototoxic effects, including overuse of painkillers.

## **The Benefits of Hearing Aids**

With the many ways hearing loss can reduce wellbeing, it's clear how essential it is to address it early. The good news is that modern hearing aids offer an effective solution.

[Today's digital hearing aids](#) allow sounds to be amplified, filtered and adjusted to suit one's exact type of hearing loss. Advanced models can stream audio directly from smartphones and TVs and filter out background noise in crowded settings.

Evidence shows hearing aids can:

- Boost memory, alertness and mood
- Reduce dementia and depression risk
- Improve balance and physical mobility
- Enhance social engagement and reduce isolation

- Strengthen relationships and communication
- Increase independence in daily activities

Thanks to technological advances, today's hearing aids are highly customisable for each user's needs. It's important to see an audiologist to get your hearing tested and professionally fitted for aids suited to your level of loss. While hearing loss may be common, its impacts on wellbeing are too significant to ignore. Seeking treatment early is key to staying happy and healthy.

Left unaddressed, hearing loss can accelerate cognitive decline, compromise mental health, reduce physical mobility and undermine relationship quality. But the good news is proven solutions exist in the form of modern hearing aids and audio technologies. Combined with lifestyle adjustments to stay socially engaged, hearing loss does not have to limit life quality or independence.

If you notice potential changes in your own or a loved one's hearing, prompt professional assistance is advised.