

Cognitive Decline and Hearing Loss

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When I was a new audiologist in the late 1960's, it was common practice to fit just one hearing aid to address a person's hearing problem. While this presented some problems (hearing in noisy areas, telling where sound was coming from, providing too much amplification in one ear to compensate for not hearing in the other ear), the idea was that two hearing aids just cost too much! (Gasoline costs just 20 cents a gallon then).

It wasn't very long before audiological research showed that the use of just one hearing aid created other problems for people. It was found that the use of a single hearing aid often caused the ear without a hearing aid to have reduced ability to understand speech just from not being stimulated.

In the late 1990's the National Council on Aging, reported that hearing impaired people who did not use hearing aids had more depression, reduced social interactions, increased anxiety, increased fatigue, and poorer relationships with their family and friends.



People who needed hearing aids but did not get them often withdrew from the activities they used to enjoy so their overall quality of life diminished. Humans are social animals and if you can't share your life with others you lose a major problem that can create other changes in your body! This led Helen Keller to say "When you lose your vision, you lose things. When you lose your hearing you lose people!"

Recent research from Johns Hopkins School of Medicine confirms what audiologists realized back in the early 70's. The lack of sound stimulation may result in actual shrinkage of the hearing centers in the brain with the possible linkage to the development of cognitive decline, Alzheimer's, and dementia.



In analyzing this data, there is a clear parallel to other research that showed the lack of sound stimulation for newborn mice resulted in the lack of brain and neural development in the hearing centers of the brain. Since hearing loss is the most common birth defect affecting newborn babies, this type of research was important in implementing newborn hearing screening that is now required in almost every state for every baby.

Other research showed that young children with long standing or chronic ear infections deprive the brain of proper sound stimulation. This may result in speech-language problems and/or a condition called Central Auditory Processing Disorder (Auditory Perceptual Disorder) that may mimic childhood hyperactivity and reduce classroom performance.

The take-home message here is that hearing is important. Hearing loss is not a benign condition as it causes or contributes to real changes in the body and how we live every day. The ear is a part of the body and when the ear suffers the whole body suffers. It is important for overall health and wellness to keep your ears working as good as they can.

In fact, **Medicare recommends that a hearing test be done for every new Medicare enrollee within 6 months of turning 65 as part of the Wellness Assessment.** As an audiological provider for Medicare, we encourage patients to ask their physician to refer them for a thorough hearing evaluation. Hearing tests are covered under Medicare for medical diagnostic purposes when provided by a licensed audiologist.



Smart hearing instruments today are discreet and provide the sound stimulation you need help reduce your chances of Alzheimer's, dementia, and cognitive decline. Hearing instruments alone may not totally prevent the shrinkage of your brain as nutrition, exercise, and social contacts are also important. They are good cognitive insurance as once the shrinkage has happened, it may be impossible to bring it back.

If you are starting to "forget why you went into the kitchen" or "where you put your keys", it is time to get your hearing tested. You are invited to learn more by checking out these two videos that can help improve your brain function, slow aging, and your overall quality of life.

Mindworks <https://vimeo.com/103293745>

Vivix <http://content.shaklee.com/shaklee/video/player.php?video=Vivix>