

RESEARCH LINKS HEARING LOSS AND DEMENTIA

For the past few years there has been a great deal of research into the causes of dementia, and many separate studies point to a connection between untreated hearing loss and dementia as well as other types of cognitive decline. A recent analysis of 36 different research studies with over 20,000 study participants concluded “age-related hearing loss was significantly associated with decline in all main cognitive domains and with increased risk for cognitive impairment and incident dementia.” In other words, people with poor hearing have more problem with memory and just about everything else our brains do. Here are some highlights from key studies:

- Older adults with hearing loss have a 24-percent higher risk of cognitive impairment compared with normal-hearing individuals and they experience such decline sooner.
- How much did cognitive performance decline? A 25-dB hearing loss (which is considered a “borderline” or mild loss by most professionals) was equivalent to the reduction in cognitive performance associated with a 6.8-year age difference.
- Study participants with hearing loss were much more likely to be diagnosed with dementia over time: the worse the loss, the greater the chance of that diagnosis.
- In addition, hearing loss is associated with clinical depression: the odds increased approximately 45% for every 20-dB increase in hearing loss. Depression is another risk factor for dementia.
- Although brains typically shrink with age, the rate of shrinkage is faster for people with hearing loss.
- The Lancet Commission found that Hearing loss was the single largest out of nine modifiable risk factors for dementia.

What about hearing aids? There hasn't been nearly as much research completed yet about the differences between cognitive performance of people who wear hearing aids, but early results are promising: a study at the University of Texas found that after only two weeks of hearing aid use participants showed improved scores on tests like word recall, selective attention and processing speed.

You've only got one brain: to keep it working at its best make sure to get your hearing checked, and if hearing aids are recommended HEAR In America Hearing Plans can help make sure you get the best value and care. Call 1-800-286-6149 to register for a free hearing screening for yourself or a loved one.