



Hearing Loss, Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia

September is World Alzheimer's Month and September 21 is World Alzheimer's Day, a good opportunity to raise awareness of connections between memory, cognitive function, and hearing loss. Hearing Loss is now linked to Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia. According to several major studies, older adults with hearing loss are more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease and dementia, compared to those with normal hearing and the risk escalates as a person's hearing loss grows worse. A pair of studies out of Johns Hopkins found that hearing loss is associated with accelerated cognitive decline in older adults and that seniors with hearing loss are significantly more likely to develop dementia over time than those who retain their hearing. A third Johns Hopkins study revealed a link between hearing loss and accelerated brain tissue loss. The researchers found that for older adults with hearing loss, brain tissue loss happens faster than it does for those with normal hearing. Some experts believe that interventions, like professionally fitted hearing aids, could potentially delay or prevent dementia. Research in these areas is ongoing. Studies also indicate that maintaining strong social connections and keeping mentally active as we age might lower the risk of cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease, according to the Alzheimer's Association website.

Ask yourself the following questions to make a quick assessment about your hearing health:

- Do people seem to be mumbling?
- Do you have to strain to hear when someone talks or whispers?
- Do you have difficulties hearing someone call you from behind or from another room?
- Do you need to watch a speaker's lips more closely to follow conversation?
- Do you find it hard to keep up in meetings, restaurants or in lectures?
- Do you have to turn up the volume on the television or radio?
- Do you find it hard to hear clearly on the telephone?
- Do you have difficulties at the theatre, cinema or other entertainment venues?
- Do you find it hard to hear in noisy environments like the street or in a car?
- Do you limit your social activities because it's difficult to hear and communicate?
- Do family, friends or colleagues mention that they often need to repeat themselves?

The Better Hearing Institute (BHI) is also urging people to visit its website www.betterhearing.org to take a free, confidential hearing test to determine if they need a more comprehensive hearing test by a hearing healthcare professional. Interestingly, BHI research shows that people with hearing difficulty who use hearing aids are more likely to have a stronger support network of family and friends, feel engaged in life, and meet up with friends to socialize. They even say that using hearing aids has a positive effect on their relationships.



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