

our press release



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<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/qv0vgfsf6hjlers/AADBS6taBncBaafv-MQXS488a?dl=0>

Main headline: Long-Term Study Is First to Show Wearing Hearing Aids

Sub-headline: Reduces Risk of Cognitive Decline Associated with Hearing Loss

Slug: A Wake-up Call to Address Hearing Loss Now

Without hearing we lose contact with the world around us: friends chatting, the laughter of children, the joy of music and expressions of love. It’s not just the elderly who are affected by hearing loss. While it’s often associated with advancing age it can also be caused by birth defects, infections or injury. There are three types of hearing loss: conductive, sensorineural and a combination of the two. Conductive hearing loss is caused by problems in the outer and middle ear that prevent sound reaching the inner ear. The most common causes are a build-up of wax in the ear canal, perforated eardrums, fluid in the middle ear and damaged or defective ossicles (tiny bones in the middle ear). Sensorineural hearing loss results when the delicate sensory cells or nerve fibres in the inner ear are damaged, which stops them from transmitting sound properly. The most common causes are the natural ageing process and excessive exposure to noise. This condition is often permanent. It is well-established that untreated hearing loss can lead to an acceleration of cognitive problems.

A just-published study in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society is the first to show that wearing hearing aids reduces cognitive decline associated with hearing loss. The study, “Self-Reported Hearing Loss: Hearing Aids and Cognitive Decline in Elderly Adults: A 25-year Study”, followed 3,670 adults, age 65 and older over a 25-year period. Professor H el ene Amieva, a leading researcher in the Neuropsychology and Epidemiology of Aging at the University of Bordeaux, France, headed up the study which was part of the Personnes Ag es QUID cohort (PAQUID), a cohort specifically designed to study brain aging.



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Researchers compared the trajectory of cognitive decline among older adults who were using hearing aids and those who were not. The study found no difference in the rate of cognitive decline between the control group of people with no reported hearing loss and people with hearing loss who used hearing aids. By contrast, hearing loss was significantly associated with lower baseline scores on the Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE), a well-recognised test of cognitive function, during the 25-year follow-up period, independent of age, sex and education.

The early findings of the study were shared by Professor Amieva at a professional conference sponsored by Oticon, attended by more than 300 hearing care professionals. “The study indicates that people with hearing loss who wear hearing aids have the same risk for age-related cognitive decline as people without hearing loss,” says Thomas Behrens, MSc, Head of Audiology and Centre for Applied Audiology Research, Oticon A/S. “But cognitive decline is accelerated for the people who have hearing loss and don’t use hearing aids. With this study, we are seeing for the first time evidence that hearing aids are a prevention against accelerated cognitive decline in later years. That’s a powerful motivator for the more than 75% of people with hearing loss who could benefit from hearing aids but are reluctant to address their hearing health.”

Improving Social Interaction and Other Cognitively Stimulating Activities

A number of studies have shown correlations between hearing loss and greater risk of cognitive decline in older adults, including a pair of studies out of Johns Hopkins that found hearing loss is associated with accelerated cognitive decline and possibly also with the onset of dementia in older adults. The vast majority of scientists in the area have agreed that cognitive decline is likely related to the lack of social interaction that older adults have because of their hearing loss. The assumption has been that if people use hearing aids and thus become socially active again or are able to maintain an appropriate level of social activity then they would decrease their risk of a more rapid decline in cognitive skills. The new study appears to corroborate those assumptions. The link to dementia is more complex. One of the most likely explanations is that the cognitive decline associated with hearing loss adds to the deterioration also caused by Alzheimer’s disease and thereby leads to crossing the threshold for the diagnosis of dementia at an early point in time.

“Brain First” Hearing Aid Technology

These findings add to a large body of evidence showing that technologies used in hearing aids must be designed to minimize the mental effort that hearing loss leads to when listening to speech in background noise. For almost 20 years, Oticon researchers at the world renowned Eriksholm research center have focused on BrainHearing™ technology, an approach that carefully processes the speech signal so it is presented to the person’s brain as clearly and accurately as possible - the way the brain is best able to understand it. With more sound information, the brain doesn’t have to work as hard to understand what is being said. The result is a clearer, more effortless listening experience. For people who wear hearing aids, this means less demanding mental processing throughout the day so they can engage more actively in everyday life.

“The transition from sound to meaning happens in the brain,” explains Behrens. “When hearing is compromised, such as with hearing loss, the sound signal that the brain is accustomed to processing is different and it takes more effort to fill in the blanks. This is why hearing loss can be so tiring and can drain the mental energy people need for everyday activities. People may respond by withdrawing socially because it’s just too exhausting to try to keep up. Social isolation and the resulting depression and health issues have long been recognized as increased risk factors for dementia and Alzheimer’s disease.”

Hearing Care is Health Care

Hearing loss is the most common chronic health condition affecting older adults. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 360 million people worldwide have disabling hearing loss. The PAQUID study underscores the importance of addressing the challenges of under-diagnosis and under-treatment of hearing loss. More than 75% of people with some degree of hearing loss have not had treatment. Even among people who eventually get treatment for hearing loss, many delays seeking help for an average of 7 to 10 years from the time they could benefit from hearing aids. “This study should be a wake-up call for people who are considering doing something about treating their hearing loss but have been delaying,” says Behrens. “It’s not just about hearing well today, it’s about the long-term effects of untreated hearing loss.”

Capitalizing on Better Hearing on the Job and at Home

If you’ve started to detect changes in your hearing, don’t wait. You can control the situation. And doing something to address your hearing health can change your life for the better. Seeking help from a qualified hearing care professional is the first step. Quality hearing care begins with a thorough hearing evaluation. Based on your results, you and your hearing care specialist can decide on the best hearing solution for you.

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While you can't reverse hearing loss, you don't have to resign yourself to living in a world of quieter, less distinct sounds. At Oticon, our goal is to provide you with the best hearing technology available so that you can rediscover your hearing and reconnect with every listening experience around you. People are often surprised to see that today's hearing instruments look nothing like their predecessors. The "big beige bananas" of the past have been replaced by sleeker, virtually invisible models that are so small and discreet, they are barely noticeable.

For more information about hearing health, hearing loss and BrainHearing™ technology, email info@oticon.com or visit <http://brainhearing.oticon.co.za/>

ENDS

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Background information: Oticon

Oticon is one of the most innovative Hearing Aid Manufacturers in the world. With more than 100 years of experience, Oticon has spearheaded a number of technological breakthroughs which have made a significant difference in the lives of people with hearing loss, including the first ear-level digital hearing aid, the first hearing system with Artificial Intelligence, the first “fashionable” hearing device and the first hearing device to connect wirelessly to modern, Bluetooth™ enabled equipment. By putting people first, Oticon has become a company of firsts. Today’s tiny, discreet and technologically advanced hearing aids are barely noticeable - thanks to Oticon. “People First” is Oticon’s promise, “to empower people to communicate freely, interact naturally and participate actively.”

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Background information: Oticon SA Spokespersons (Radio Interviews)

Margot Christie, Corporate Audiologist at Oticon South Africa (Afrikaans)

Margot Christie is a qualified Audiologist holding a BSc degree in Audiology from the University of Cape Town. With a special interest in hearing aid technology, as well as in business, Margot has completed various business-related courses. She is also a keen runner, cyclist and oenologist.
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Husmita Ratanjee, Research Audiologist, Centre for Applied Audiology Research, Oticon A/S (English)

Husmita Ratanjee, Research Audiologist, Centre for Applied Audiology Research, Oticon A/S
A South African Audiologist with a Bachelor of Science degree in Audiology has recently earned her Master’s in Communication Pathology (Audiology) has worked both in the clinical and corporate setting. With having the opportunity to work in South African, Canada and Denmark. Husmita is a part of the Centre for Applied Audiology Research at Oticon Head Offices in Denmark as a Research Audiologist.
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