

DEMENTIA LINK TO HEARING LOSS

There are approximately 850,000 people living with dementia in the UK and this is set to rise to over 1 million by 2025. This equates to roughly 1 in 80 people in the general population and costs around £26 billion per year in health and social care. Recently, The Lancet identified a list of lifestyle factors that can be modified to help reduce our risk of dementia. Smoking and obesity contribute to this risk as you might expect, along with depression and social isolation. However, surprisingly the highest contributing factor our dementia risk is hearing loss that comes with age. The easy answer to reduce this risk is wearing hearing aids.

Figures show that while as many as 40% of adults over 50 have a hearing loss, incredibly only half of us who could benefit from a hearing aid actually wear one.

Evidence* also suggests that people wait on average 10 years before seeking help for their hearing loss, and that when they do, GPs fail to refer 30-45% to audiology services.

"We know that those who try to cope with hearing loss often end up being isolated, and switch off in social situations. It can be a real struggle to try to keep up with conversations," says Paul Checkley, Clinical Director at North London Hearing. "However, new technology hearing aids that are fitted correctly can really make a difference. The sooner you get started with hearing aids the more likely you are to get real benefit."

Studies are now underway looking at the improvements in brain function wearing a hearing aid can provide. When a group who wore hearing aids were compared to a group who did not, the group who wore them performed better in measures assessing working memory and aspects of attention than those who did not. On one attention measure, people who wore hearing aids also showed faster reaction times.

Dr Anne Corbett, from the University of Exeter, said: "Previous research has shown that hearing loss is linked to a loss of brain function, memory and an increased risk of dementia. Our work is one of the largest studies to look at the impact of wearing a hearing aid, and suggests that wearing a hearing aid could actually protect the brain. We now need more research and a clinical trial to test this and perhaps feed into policy to help keep people healthy in later life."

"The message here is that if you're advised you need a hearing aid, find one that works for you. At the very least it will improve your hearing and it could help keep your brain sharp too," said Professor Clive Ballard, of the University of Exeter Medical School.

*Source: Action on Hearing Loss



Paul Checkley is Clinical Director at the independent hearing clinic North London Hearing, HCA Healthcare Golders Green Outpatients and Diagnostics & North West Hearing in Cheadle, Greater Manchester. If you have any hearing concerns for yourself or a family member call 020 8455 6361 for Golders Green or 0161 491 1943 for Cheadle.

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