

Good Hearing Could Decrease Your Risk of Dementia

Submitted by: The PR Room

Thursday, 19 May 2022

Poor hearing is believed to be the main modifiable risk factor for dementia. This Dementia Action Week (<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-involved/dementia-action-week>), Oticon stresses the importance of taking action to treat hearing loss.

Copenhagen, Denmark, 19th May 2022 – If you are unaware that dementia can be prevented or delayed, you are not alone. It is a condition most people associate with age, when in fact, it is not necessarily a normal part of ageing at all. Tackling this common misconception is of the utmost importance as 10 million new cases of dementia are recorded globally each year and is expected to rise exponentially. It is reported that there are 12 modifiable risk factors that account for up to 40% of dementia cases* - unaddressed hearing loss (<https://www.oticon.global/hearing-aid-users/hearing-loss/understand-hearing-loss/what-is-hearing-loss>) is believed to be the leading preventable cause of dementia.

A delay in addressing hearing loss can have serious adverse effects on your health and lifestyle. Depression and low social contact are particularly common effects of poor hearing, both of which are also known modifiable risks for dementia. Unfortunately, it can often be difficult to notice if your hearing is reducing as it can happen very gradually. You may not immediately notice that you can no longer hear the birds chirping or your own footsteps anymore. It is all too easy to get used to and live with reduced hearing ability, often for many, many years. Promptly seeking treatment as soon as you recognise your hearing loss could help you to reduce the risks to your health and well-being and protect you from dementia in the future.

Thomas Behrens, Vice President of Audiology at leading hearing aid provider, Oticon (<https://www.oticon.global/>), comments:

“Hearing is interlinked with so much of what we do every day. With a diminished ability to hear there is a knock-on effect to our lives, and indeed our health, which unfortunately is sometimes invisible. Treating your hearing loss, and taking care of your hearing health throughout life, can deter many adverse effects.”

“Wearing hearing aids is encouraged to help prevent dementia, and the better a hearing aid supports your hearing loss, the less your life and health are impacted. With good hearing you will have more enjoyment and increased confidence to take part in the social engagements that many with hearing loss find too difficult, tiring and stressful, which tends to lead to increased isolation, and potentially loneliness and depression. The better you hear, the easier it is for you to fully participate in life and benefit from the positive social stimulation essential to keep your brain fit and healthy,” concludes Thomas Behrens.

Do we take hearing loss seriously?

If the modifiable risks of dementia were more widely known, it could help significantly reduce the amount of people diagnosed or postpone diagnosis with the debilitating condition in the future. So too could more knowledge and a wider understanding of the health effects of hearing loss. In a recent nationally representative hearing loss survey^{***}, conducted by hearing aid manufacturer, Oticon, it was revealed

that only 14% of people realise that untreated hearing loss can age the brain, and just 20% knew that hearing loss can change the way the brain actually functions. Only around 52% of people know that living with hearing loss can lead to social isolation and only 43% know that hearing loss can increase the risk of depression.

Potentially, millions of people are increasing their risk of dementia and jeopardizing their health. In the same hearing loss research by Oticon, a vast number of respondents said that they have problems hearing. Of those, 81% hadn't sought advice or treatment, mostly because they were willing to wait until their hearing loss affected their quality of life or worsened. Worryingly, 25% had no plans to seek treatment.

How can wearing hearing aids help prevent dementia?

As well as helping us to participate in conversation and supporting us to live an active life, hearing aids (<https://www.oticon.global/hearing-aid-users/hearing-aids/products/all>) help prevent the direct effect of hearing loss on our brain. If you can hear well in a way that is almost natural, your brain will not compensate by relying more on information from other senses. Primarily, with hearing loss, our natural reaction to attempt to lip read kicks in which actually refocuses brain resources and eventually changes the way our brain behaves. Importantly, the compensation activity of the brain can occupy cognitive capacity, so it becomes more difficult to remember what is heard or to reflect on, and respond to information received, as needed to be socially engaged. Wearing effective hearing aids frees up the cognitive energy needed for other important functions such as memory recall and lessens the tiring burden on the brain. A study of health insurance data revealed that by wearing hearing aids, in less than 3 years, older adults with hearing loss reduced their risk of Alzheimers by 17% and depression by 14%**.

The full understanding of the links between hearing loss, dementia and how hearing aids can help is not yet fully understood, but there is a general consensus in the research community that it is important to treat hearing loss.

Take care of your hearing to help prevent dementia:

As with most health conditions, early intervention is key to delay or halt progression. By taking care of your hearing today, you can ultimately help preserve your brain's functionality and capacity for longer, and it is never too late to make a difference. Oticon has carried out pioneering research on how hearing loss affects the brain and is dedicated to innovating hearing aid technologies that reduce the effort the brain endures trying to make sense of sound. The Oticon 'BrainHearing' (<https://www.oticon.global/hearing-aid-users/hearing-loss/understand-hearing-loss/how-hearing-works>)TM philosophy has shaken up the hearing industry and continues to do so, resulting in radically new ways to help support hearing loss.

Dementia Action Week, the annual awareness campaign by Alzheimer's Society, is designed to encourage people to 'act on dementia'. This year's awareness campaign runs 16th-22nd May.

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About Oticon

500 million people worldwide suffer from hearing loss. The majority are over the age of 50 while eight

percent are under the age of 18. Oticon's vision is to create a world where people are no longer limited by hearing loss. A world where hearing aids fit seamlessly into life and help people realise their full potential, while avoiding the health consequences of hearing loss. Oticon develops and manufactures hearing aids for both adults and children and supports every kind of hearing loss from mild to profound and we pride ourselves on developing some of the most innovative hearing aids in the market. Headquartered in Denmark, we are a global company and part of Demant with more than 18,000 employees and revenues of around DKK 18 billion. Changing technology. Changing conventions. Changing lives. Oticon – Life-changing hearing technology. <https://www.oticon.global> (<https://www.oticon.global>)

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* Livingston et al. 2020. Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2020 report of the Lancet Commission. Lancet.

** Mahmoudi et al. (2019) "Can Hearing Aids Delay Time to Diagnosis of Dementia, Depression, or Falls in Older Adults?"

*** UK survey of 2,000 adults