

# Is There a Connection Between Hearing Loss and Cognitive Decline?

October 1, 2014

## AccuNotes newsletter result:

Open rate	Click Through rate
Patient - 36.45%	Patient - 40.27%
Non-Patient - 22.07%	Patient - 43.35%

There are many side effects commonly associated with hearing loss, but one largely unknown consequence is mild cognitive decline that affects memory and thinking skills due to brain tissue loss.

Several studies show concrete evidence that those with severe auditory impairment can suffer a more serious declining mental ability significantly beyond the levels expected from aging alone. As a family member or friend, it's important to understand what someone experiencing these symptoms is going through, as well as how to effectively attend to their needs moving forward.

## Inactivity in the brain

In an earlier post we shared that researchers from Johns Hopkins recently explored the correlation between cognitive decline and hearing loss by analyzing the results of the Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging from 1958. The exam focused on comparing brain changes over time between adults with normal hearing and adults with impaired hearing, checking to see how mental ability was impacted by aging between the two groups. The professors used MRI brain scans to visually track the changes in the brain over the course of 10 years, eventually discovering that those with auditory damage lost more than 1 additional cubic centimeter of brain tissue every year when compared to those who had normal hearing.

Researchers found that rapid cognitive decline was caused by an underdeveloped auditory cortex and lack of stimulation to memory and sensory integration regions of the brain. The report also indicated that receiving treatment for hearing loss sooner rather than later was the only way to effectively combat against these issues.

## **Other potential connections**

There are additional factors that can play a role in the progress of cognitive decline. According to Harvard University, [social isolation](#) is a common symptom of hearing loss that can also be linked back to risk factors for mental impairment.

A lack of desire to be around friends and family because of hearing loss can stem from a number of issues, perhaps because they feel as though they are a burden or are simply embarrassed by having to constantly ask people to repeat themselves. Decreased socialization leads to minimal brain stimulation due to lack of communication. If you know someone who could be at risk for hearing loss, it's important to attempt social interactions with them as much as possible to help them realize that their condition is not a setback. It's also wise to talk to them about the advantages [hearing aids](#) can supply, especially when it comes to being able to hear what someone's saying without asking them to speak up.

## **Interacting with those who have hearing loss**

Even with the help of hearing aids, fully comprehending sounds and words through conversation can still be tricky for the hearing impaired. When chatting with a friend or family member who has a hearing loss, always try to face the person directly and maintain eye contact. This way the sound of your voice will be directed toward their ears and they can watch your mouth and lip movements. You'll want to speak clearly and distinctly, but that doesn't mean shouting at them or exaggerating mouth movements, which can be insulting. Also try to shut off any unnecessary noises when engaged in conversation, such as the television or a fan.

Remember, treatment at the onset of hearing loss is the best way to make conversations clearer, but could also prevent symptoms of cognitive decline from occurring. Talk to your loved one about scheduling a screening with an AccuQuest [audiologist](#) or hearing health care professional in the area to get the ball rolling.