

# Cortland Hearing News



Hearing news you can use!

Spring 2014

## When Should I Have My Hearing Checked?

Despite the rapid growth of hearing loss — which is now the third most common health condition in the United States — there is little national attention to healthy hearing. Many individuals don't understand how to avoid or prevent hearing damage, how to recognize subtle changes in hearing, or even when to see an audiologist.

We routinely take care of our teeth and eyes, and have them regularly seen by doctors, as part of our efforts to remain healthy. Why should your hearing be held in any less regard?

When your hearing levels are checked regularly it becomes easier for an audiologist to notice a change in your hearing — just as an ophthalmologist can recognize changes in your eyesight.

A base level is also important because most individuals remain unaware of the fact that their hearing may be compromised. It is most often assumed that if a change in hearing isn't a bother, then it doesn't need to be treated. The truth of the matter is that hearing is one of your most reliable senses and it's easy to take it for granted. In reality, your ears do more than just help you hear.

Hearing is just as tied to whole body health as are your eyes and teeth and it is one of the simplest things you can address to keep your mental and physical health as you age. Having your hearing checked regularly will keep you aware of your ears, the latest research on keeping good hearing, and any damage that needs to be addressed.

Pay attention to your hearing — make sure you keep your whole world within your grasp.

## Hearing Loss and Dementia Linked in Study

Seniors with hearing loss are significantly more likely to develop dementia over time than those who retain their hearing, a study by Johns Hopkins and National Institute on Aging researchers suggests. The findings, the researchers say, could lead to new ways to combat dementia, a condition that affects millions of people worldwide and carries heavy societal burdens.

Although the reason for the link between the two conditions is unknown, the investigators suggest that a common pathology may underlie both or that the strain of decoding sounds over the years may overwhelm the brains of people with hearing loss, leaving them more vulnerable to dementia. They also speculate that hearing loss could lead to dementia by making individuals more socially isolated, a known risk factor for dementia and other cognitive disorders.

Whatever the cause, the scientists report, their finding may offer a starting point for interventions — even as simple as hearing aids — that could delay or prevent dementia by improving patients' hearing.

"Researchers have looked at what affects hearing loss, but few have looked at how hearing loss affects cognitive brain function," says study leader Frank Lin, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor in the Division of Otology at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. "There hasn't been much crosstalk between otologists and geriatricians, so it's been unclear whether hearing loss and dementia are related."

To make the connection, Lin and his colleagues used data from the Baltimore Longitudinal Study on Aging (BLSA). The BLSA, initiated by the National Institute on Aging in 1958, has tracked various health factors in thousands of men and women over decades.

The new study, published in the February Archives of Neurology, focused on 639 people

whose hearing and cognitive abilities were tested as part of the BLSA between 1990 and 1994. While about a quarter of the volunteers had some hearing loss at the start of the study, none had dementia.

These volunteers were then closely followed with repeat examinations every one to two years, and by 2008, 58 of them had developed dementia. The researchers found that study participants with hearing loss at the beginning of the study were significantly more likely to develop dementia by the end. Compared with volunteers with normal hearing, those with mild, moderate, and severe hearing loss had twofold, threefold, and fivefold, respectively, the risk of developing dementia over time. The more hearing loss they had, the higher their likelihood of developing the memory-robbing disease.

Even after the researchers took into account other factors that are associated with risk of dementia, including diabetes, high blood pressure, age, sex and race, Lin explains, hearing loss and dementia were still strongly connected.

"A lot of people ignore hearing loss because it's such a slow and insidious process as we age," Lin says. "Even if people feel as if they are not affected, we're showing that it may well be a more serious problem."



**Dr. Suzette Pace, Au.D.** looks forward to seeing you soon. Call **Cortland Hearing Aids** today at **607.756.1053** to schedule your next appointment!



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