

## Hearing Loss and Health...What's the Connection?

Hearing Loss is one of the most prevalent, yet widely ignored, chronic health conditions. One in three people over the age of 65 suffer from hearing loss, often undiagnosed. Hearing loss was once viewed as a normal part of aging, having minimal effect on patients' lives. Today, new longitudinal clinical studies confirm hearing loss is interconnected to a number of long-term health issues.

### Leading clinical researchers show hearing loss is directly linked with:

- Greater risk of dementia and Alzheimer's: even a MILD hearing loss carries double the risk.
- Increased cognitive decline: people with hearing loss have up to 40% faster decline per year.
- Depression.
- Social Isolation and lack of engagement.
- Increased falls with broken bones.

The data from these studies clearly indicate that hearing loss has significant consequences if untreated. Unfortunately, many patients and their doctors are not aware of the lack of hearing. Fortunately, treatment of hearing loss with hearing aids is highly efficacious. Hearing aids can address over 90% of hearing losses when correctly prescribed and accurately programmed (fitted).

### Recommended Actions for Physicians To Address Hearing Loss:

- Regularly screen for hearing loss at age 65 and older
- Screen patients with conditions that increase the risk of hearing loss, e.g., diabetes and smoking.
- Refer patients with hearing loss or tinnitus for a formal audiological evaluation

In conclusion, hearing loss is a medical problem that requires proper diagnosis and treatment. Patients with hearing loss, even if assumed to be due to aging, require evaluation by a Doctor of Audiology or ENT according to best practice guidelines. Patients should never be referred to non-audiologist hearing aid dealers employed by national chain hearing aid dispensaries.

Bogardus ST Jr, Yueh B, Shekelle PG. Screening and management of adult hearing loss in primary care: clinical applications. *JAMA*. 2003 Apr 16;289(15):1986-90 ; Frank Lin, et.al. Hearing Loss Prevalence and Risk Factors among Adults in the United States. *J Gerontol A Biol Sci Med Sci*. 2011 May; 66A(5): 582-59 ; Frank Lin, et. al. Hearing Loss and Incident Dementia. *Arch Neurol*. Feb 2011; 68: 214-220 ; Frank R. Lin, MD, PhD; et al. Hearing Loss and Cognitive Decline in Older Adults . *JAMA Intern Med*. 2013;173(4):293-299; Zhong X, Yost WA. Relationship between Postural Stability and Spatial Hearing. *J Am Acad Audiol*. 2013 Oct;24(9):782-8

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