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How Treating Hearing Loss Could Help Prevent Dementia

Researchers are still determining how hearing loss affects brain function, but studies show it may contribute to a faster rate of atrophy in the brain.

There are many reasons our sense of hearing is central to our quality of life. Connecting with loved ones, engaging with our community, and enjoying music are a few examples. Our hearing also helps us balance as we walk and can warn us of danger.

But there's another benefit you might not have considered: mental and cognitive health. Studies have found a link between hearing loss and increased risk for dementia. Untreated hearing loss can also lead to social isolation and depression.

The association between dementia and hearing loss was first made in 1989 by doctors at the University of Washington. Since then, numerous studies have supported and expanded on those findings.

In 2011, researchers at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine published one of the largest such studies. The study tracked 639 adults for nearly 12 years. It found the likelihood of developing dementia increased in direct proportion to the extent of hearing loss. So much so that:

- Mild hearing loss *doubled* dementia risk.
- Moderate hearing loss *tripled* dementia risk.
- Severe hearing impairment made subjects *five times more likely* to develop dementia.

Exactly how hearing loss impairs brain function is something researchers are still pinpointing. Loss of hearing may contribute to a faster rate of atrophy in the brain. In addition, when we have trouble hearing, our brain must work harder to process sound and language. This strain then reduces other brain functions, such as decision making and memory.

The good news

Hearing loss is largely treatable. And while using hearing aids may not eliminate your risk for dementia, research suggests it could reduce or delay cognitive decline. In fact, it's one of the best things you can do to protect your brain.

Dementia is caused by a combination of factors. Some of these we can't control, such as genetics. But hearing loss is something you have the power to change.

Hearing loss is now known to be the biggest modifiable risk factor for developing dementia. A 2020 report places it above smoking, high blood pressure, and lack of exercise. It's even bigger than social isolation, head injuries, excessive alcohol consumption, and exposure to air pollution.

Nearly 25% of those ages 65 to 74 have disabling hearing loss, and that rate jumps to 50% for those 75 and older. Unfortunately, most people with hearing loss live with it untreated.

The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders estimates that only about 16% of adults ages 20 to 69 who could benefit from wearing hearing aids have ever used them. Among people age 70 and older with hearing loss, fewer than one in three (30%) has ever used hearing aids.

There are many reasons people avoid seeking help for hearing loss. Often, it's a belief that hearing loss is normal with age and therefore acceptable. Others are dissuaded by the stigma of wearing a hearing aid; they fear hearing aids will make them look old or unattractive.

Don't let myths keep you from better hearing

The truth is that today's hearing aids and cochlear implants are less noticeable than ever before. The technology has also greatly improved in recent decades. For example, newer models have improved sound quality in large, noisy settings. Many include rechargeable batteries, Bluetooth compatibility, and mobile apps, making them convenient and easy to use.

There's still much we need to learn about the connection between hearing loss and dementia, but the evidence so far is compelling. Having your hearing checked is easy and may be covered by your insurance. And the sooner you act, the better – for your physical and mental well-being.

Sources: National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, Johns Hopkins Medicine, JAMA Network, The Lancet

Courtesy of PacificSource

Does Medicare Cover Hearing Aids?

Medicare Part A and Part B do not cover hearing aids, so you'll pay 100% of the cost for them unless you have additional coverage under Medicare Part C. Most Medicare Advantage plans (Medicare Part C) cover a portion of the cost of hearing aids and hearing exams. Visit [medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov) to learn more.



Managing Your Wellness With a Chronic Condition

The most important step you can take is to partner with your health care provider to create a plan to manage your condition.

Chronic diseases are diseases that last one year or longer and require ongoing medical attention. If you have been diagnosed with a chronic disease, you are not alone. Chronic diseases are common in the U.S., with 6 in 10 adults having one chronic condition and 4 in 10 adults having more than one chronic condition. Some common chronic diseases include heart disease and stroke, cancer, and diabetes. It is important to partner with your provider to create a plan to manage your condition. Managing a chronic disease is a life journey. Start with these recommended steps:

Make an appointment to discuss your health with your provider

It is important to work together with your provider to help manage your condition.

- Your Providence Medicare Advantage plan offers an enhanced annual wellness visit where you can discuss these topics, and your provider may make recommendations for how best to manage or prevent chronic conditions.

Engage in preventive care with your provider

Working with your provider to make sure you are monitoring your condition can ensure that any changes in your health are caught early. This can prevent further complications and help improve your quality of life.

- If you have diabetes, recommended routine preventive care includes A1C monitoring, blood pressure monitoring, kidney screening, and diabetic eye exam. Depending on your risk factors, your provider may recommend taking a statin medication to support your health.

- Approximately one in two women over the age of 50 will break a bone due to osteoporosis, and falls are a leading risk factor of breaking a bone. Your doctor may assess your risk of falling and provide safety tips for how to prevent a fall. If you have a fall, your provider may order a bone mineral density scan to assess osteoporosis.
- It is important to get preventive screenings for cancer at recommended intervals. Your provider can support you in getting important screenings, including those that screen for colorectal and breast cancers.

Find ways to manage your stress

A chronic condition can come with many stressors, from dealing with treatments to physical and emotional pain. Living with a chronic condition can be difficult, but there are many ways to make stress more manageable. Below are some ideas for reducing the stress of chronic conditions from the Mayo Clinic:

- Understanding your condition can reduce the stress that can come from the unknown. Try to understand your ailments, so you can feel in control of your condition. Find a support group that is specific to your chronic condition, and engage with others. Do your own research, and be prepared with questions at your next doctor's appointment.
- Circumstances with your chronic condition can change, or you may learn something new about your condition. If this occurs, give yourself the opportunity to feel your emotions. Share your thoughts and feelings with loved ones, and seek out therapy to help manage your emotional and behavioral health needs.

- Set short-term goals to help keep you motivated in your personal growth. Help others manage their condition, donate your time, and try new things. Exercise, meditation, and hobbies are great ways to continue your development as well.

We understand that living with a chronic condition can be challenging, but there are many ways to manage, cope, and improve your life. Please reach out to your health care team to get your questions answered.

Courtesy of Providence Health Assurance

Learn How to Live Well With Diabetes

Learning to manage diabetes means looking at your day-to-day activities and how they can impact your blood sugar. Adding activity to your lifestyle is one step you can take to better manage your diabetes.

Activity

Being more active and exercising regularly can benefit your body in so many ways. Physical activity and regular exercise may help lower blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol, and may reduce your risk for heart disease and stroke.

When you exercise, your body may be able to use the insulin you make or inject more efficiently to reduce your blood sugar for more than 24 hours after working out. Any activity that gets you moving, like walking, dancing, or working in the yard, counts as exercise.

Here are actions you can take:

- Check with your doctor for guidance on becoming more active.
- Start slowly and gradually work up to 150 minutes of exercise each week.
- Incorporate three 10-minute brisk walks each day.
- Consider adding exercises at home or in a fitness center that increase your muscle strength and flexibility.

Weight loss

Being overweight can increase your risk for many different health conditions and complications. Whether you need to lose 10 pounds or more than 100 pounds, losing weight can be challenging. You may not know that losing just 10% of the extra weight can improve your A1C. For example, if you weigh 200 pounds, losing 20 pounds (10% of your weight) may decrease your A1C and may reduce your risk for cardiovascular complications.* Talk to your doctor about healthy ways to help you lose weight. A registered dietitian can also help you with a diet plan for weight loss.

* "Losing Weight." CDC.gov, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Feb. 13, 2018, www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/losing_weight/index.html.

Courtesy of UnitedHealthcare®

DIY Pizza: Get Creative With Cauliflower

Looking for a new spin on homemade pizza? Make a cauliflower crust and enjoy a few grain-free slices with a fork.

Ingredients

- 3 cups cauliflower florets
- 2 egg whites
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano, basil, sage, and/or thyme
- ½ cup low-fat mozzarella cheese, shredded

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 450°. Place cauliflower florets in a food processor, and pulse until a uniform “rice” texture is obtained.
2. Place cauliflower in a microwave-safe bowl, add 3-4 tbsp of water, and cook on high for 4 minutes.
3. Strain cauliflower of excess water using paper towel or tea-towel-lined strainer.
4. Place cauliflower and remaining ingredients in bowl, and mix.
5. Pour mixture out on non-stick baking sheet or parchment paper. Bake for 12 minutes, take out, and add toppings. Bake for another 5 minutes.

Nutritional information (per serving, without toppings)

Serving Size - 1 slice

Number of Servings - 8 slices

Calories	38
Total Fat	2 g
Saturated Fat	1 g
Cholesterol	4 mg
Sodium	60 mg
Total Carbohydrate	3 g
Dietary Fiber	2 g
Sugars	1 g
Protein	4 g

Courtesy of Providence Health Assurance

Lentil Confetti Salad

Prep time: 15 minutes
Cook time: 20 minutes

Ingredients

½ cup dry lentils
1½ cups water
¼ teaspoon salt
1 cup cooked brown rice
½ cup Italian dressing
½ cup tomatoes, seeded and diced
¼ cup green peppers, seeded and chopped (about ½ a small pepper)
3 tablespoons chopped onion
2 tablespoons chopped celery
6 sliced pimento-stuffed green olives
2 teaspoons chopped fresh parsley (optional)

Directions

1. Wash and drain lentils. Place in saucepan, add water and salt.
2. Bring to boil, reduce heat, and simmer, covered, about 20 minutes. Do not overcook. The lentils should be tender with skin intact. Drain immediately.
3. Combine the lentils with cooked rice, then pour dressing over mixture. Refrigerate until cool.
4. Add the rest of the ingredients, except parsley. Mix well.
5. Garnish with parsley before serving (optional).
6. Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

Notes:

No pimento-stuffed green olives?
Use pitted green olives instead.

Nutritional information (per serving)

Serving Size - 1 cup

Number of Servings - 4

Calories	160
Total Fat	6 g
Saturated Fat	0.5 g
Cholesterol	0 mg
Sodium	400 mg
Total Carbohydrate	22 g
Dietary Fiber	5 g
Sugars	4 g
Protein	1 g

Source: Food Hero, [FoodHero.org/recipes/lentil-confetti-salad](https://www.foodhero.org/recipes/lentil-confetti-salad)

Courtesy of PacificSource



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