

# Treating Hearing Loss Important for Alzheimer's and Dementia

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If you visit Healthy Hearing often, you know that there is a correlation between hearing loss and certain medical ailments such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, among others. But there is also compelling evidence to suggest a link between a hearing loss, dementia and Alzheimer's, both which are degenerative diseases that lead to progressive memory loss in the elderly.

In fact, multiple research studies have shown that hearing loss not only exacerbates the symptoms of Alzheimer's and dementia, but may also be an important risk factor.

Many symptoms of hearing loss – especially those related to difficulty in understanding and communicating - are similar to some of those found in Alzheimer's. For example, both Alzheimer's and hearing loss are known to affect speech and language skills. Depression is also a common feature of both conditions.

## ***Hearing Loss and Memory: A proven link***



***Treating hearing loss improves alertness with memory loss***

A number of studies have demonstrated a correlation between Alzheimer's, dementia and hearing loss.

One study conducted at the University of Washington with Alzheimer's patients who also had hearing loss, demonstrated a strong correlation between the severity of cognitive decline and the degree of hearing loss.

Another study carried out in the 1980s; found that 83 percent of the 30 patients diagnosed with senile dementia also suffered from a significant hearing loss, higher than normally expected for that age group. However, there was some promising news that came out of that research: 33 percent of those with memory and hearing loss were reclassified to a less severe category of dementia once the hearing loss was treated with hearing aids.

That was also demonstrated in yet another study conducted a decade ago, which showed a significant drop in communication problems in Alzheimer's patients whose hearing loss had been tested and corrected with the use of hearing aids.

The message here is clear: hearing aids can be extremely beneficial for the Alzheimer's and dementia patients, as they are for anyone with hearing loss. It is possible, however, that health care providers who do not routinely deal with elderly people the way audiologists or geriatricians do, may not be aware of the importance of screening these patients for hearing loss. As a matter

of fact, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that many seniors diagnosed with dementia or Alzheimer's don't undergo tests to rule out hearing loss.

So if anyone you know is suffering from memory loss, or displaying any [symptoms of Alzheimer's or dementia](#), encourage them to be screened for hearing loss as well. If a hearing loss is found, assistive technology such as hearing aids can, as demonstrated above, make a big difference in improving all the essential cognitive functions.

Once appropriate treatment is implemented, these people can benefit from other measures that improve the failing memory – such as music “therapy.”

### ***Music to your brain***

The common denominator in both functions – auditory and memory – is the brain, so naturally, anything we can do to boost its ability to properly process hearing, language, and memory, will be beneficial. **In other words, treating hearing loss will allow the brain to continue to be stimulated and active, allowing the patient to stay alert.**

And this is where the beneficial effects of music for people with cognitive deficiencies can be seen. Studies conducted at University of California, Davis, found that Alzheimer's patients who have difficulty with their memory still respond to music.

Other research has indicated that music stimulates the motor region of our brain and listening to familiar songs may restore a certain degree of cognitive functions in people with memory loss.

For example, Dr. Concetta Tomaino of the Institute for Music and Neurologic Function in the Bronx, NY, found that music stimulates areas of the brain that have become dormant due to degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's. She reported that 45 patients with mid-to late-stage dementia, who had one-hour personalized music therapy sessions three times a week, were able to boost their cognitive functions by an average of 50 percent within less than a year.

Again, this is where the importance of assistive hearing technology comes in, since it makes it possible for people to hear and respond to music, thus boosting their diminishing cognitive functions.

Look at it this way: good hearing is essential to stimulating parts of our brain required for memory and is also the foundation of so many other therapies that are crucial to our health and well-being.

Take heart to this message and pass it on to those you know suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's.