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# Hearing loss and depression.

Information for your patients.

## The link between hearing loss and depression has been reinforced by recent studies.

Several studies have been conducted on the link between depression and hearing loss. Recent findings indicate that of the groups studied, women of all ages and adults age 18 to 69 with hearing loss are more likely to experience "significant depression" than hearing loss sufferers over 70.<sup>1</sup>

*"We found a significant association between hearing impairment and moderate to severe depression."*<sup>2</sup>

There are several likely reasons that loss of hearing leads to depression in so many. Communication, which is vital to social interactions, becomes a source of stress when someone has to strain to hear others speak, and frequent misunderstandings result in embarrassment. After a while, people with untreated hearing loss begin to avoid social situations, particularly if they involve loud surroundings like parties or crowded restaurants where understanding speech is even more difficult. Withdrawal tends to progress until the person gradually quits on life, choosing to remain in silent isolation rather than struggle to hear and communicate publicly. Hearing loss sufferers may think they simply cannot be helped because hearing loss is a "terminal" condition for which there is no cure. Older patients may feel their hearing loss is a signal that they are simply too old to participate in social

activities. Cutting oneself off from society and activities is a red flag for depression.

*"Loss of hearing represents more than just difficulty hearing sounds. It can lead to social isolation and depression."*<sup>3</sup>

The following are ten facts medical professionals need to know about the risk of patients with hearing loss developing depression:

1. In a study conducted on Generation X and Baby Boomer patients with untreated hearing loss, participants were found more likely to develop depression and other psychological issues than their hearing peers.<sup>4</sup>
2. Another large study of adults 50 and older with untreated hearing loss found they were more likely to experience depression and other emotional and mental instabilities, and were significantly less socially active than their peers who wore hearing aids.<sup>5</sup>
3. This same study found depression and similar disorders were found to worsen as hearing ability declined.
4. Patients with untreated hearing loss find it more difficult to communicate with others, leading to the avoidance of social interaction with friends and family. Isolation is a known contributor to depression.<sup>6</sup>

**The association between hearing loss and depression has been made before but recent studies have reinforced the likelihood of this connection. While further research to establish causation is ongoing, there is enough data to suggest physicians inform patients of the link between hearing loss and depression, to advise having hearing tested annually, and encourage patients to evaluate wearing hearing aids if recommended by their hearing care professional.**

**Women and adults under the age of 70 are more susceptible to depression from hearing loss.**

**36% of patients who begin wearing hearing aids experienced improved overall mental health, while 34% increased their social engagement.<sup>10</sup>**



5. The onset of depression in older adults has been associated with the development of dementia or Alzheimer's disease – which is also a co-morbidity of hearing loss.<sup>7</sup>
6. Along with depression, patients with untreated hearing loss are known to experience anxiety, paranoia, relationship problems, stress, and other negative emotions.<sup>8</sup>
7. Using hearing aids can significantly improve emotional and cognitive conditions in patients over the age of 65.<sup>9</sup>
8. 36% of patients who begin wearing hearing aids experienced improved overall mental health, while 34% increased their social engagement.<sup>10</sup>
9. Despite the fact that hearing aids can help improve patients' lives, the average span of time from patient realization of hearing loss to purchase of hearing aids is eight years.<sup>11</sup>
10. An initiative called Healthy People 2020 calls for an increase in hearing tests for adults between the ages of 20-70.<sup>12</sup>

*"...but studies also show that people with hearing loss who use hearing aids often have fewer depressive symptoms, greater social engagement, and improved quality of life."<sup>13</sup>*



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- <sup>1</sup> JAMA Otolaryngology – Head & Neck Surgery. Hearing Impairment Associated with Depression in US Adults, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 2005-2010. 2014 (<http://archotol.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1835392#Abstract>)
- <sup>2</sup> HealthDay News. Hearing Loss Tied to Depression in Study. 2014 (<http://www.webmd.com/depression/news/20140306/hearing-loss-tied-to-depression-in-study>)
- <sup>3</sup> Harvard Health Blog. Hearing loss may be linked to mental decline. 2013 (<http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/hearing-loss-may-be-linked-to-mental-decline-201301225824>)
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- <sup>5</sup> National Council on Aging. The Consequences of Untreated Hearing Loss in Older Persons. 1999 (<http://www.ncoa.org/assets/files/pdf/center-for-healthy-aging/NCOA-Study-1999.pdf>)
- <sup>6</sup> Psychology Today. Social Isolation: A Modern Plague. 2009 (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-depression-cure/200907/social-isolation-modern-plague>)
- <sup>7</sup> Johns Hopkins Medicine. Hearing Loss in Older Adults Tied to More Hospitalizations and Poorer Physical and Mental Health. 2013 ([http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/media/releases/hearing\\_loss\\_in\\_older\\_adults\\_tied\\_to\\_more\\_hospitalizations\\_and\\_poorer\\_physical\\_and\\_mental\\_health](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/media/releases/hearing_loss_in_older_adults_tied_to_more_hospitalizations_and_poorer_physical_and_mental_health))
- <sup>8</sup> HearingAids.com. Hearing Loss & You. 2013 (<http://www.hearingaids.com/hearing-loss-you/hearing-loss-you/>)
- <sup>9</sup> Archives of Gerontology And Geriatrics. Effects of hearing aids on cognitive functions and depressive signs in elderly people. 2010 (<http://www.aggjournal.com/article/S0167-4943%2810%2900114-7/abstract?cc=y?cc=y>)
- <sup>10</sup> National Council on Aging. Hearing Loss: It's a Family Affair. 2014 (<http://www.ncoa.org/improve-health/community-education/hearing-loss-its-a-family.html>)
- <sup>11</sup> The Hearing Review. MarkeTrak VIII: The Key Influencing Factors in Hearing Aid Purchase Intent. 2012 (<http://www.hearingreview.com/2012/03/marketrak-viii-the-key-influencing-factors-in-hearing-aid-purchase-intent/>)
- <sup>12</sup> Healthypeople.gov. Hearing and Other Sensory or Communication Disorders. 2014 (<http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/overview.aspx?topicid=20>)
- <sup>13</sup> Better Hearing Institute. Don't Let Unaddressed Hearing Loss Spiral into Depression, BHI Cautions, Urging Gen Xers and Baby Boomers to Get Their Hearing Checked. 2013 (<http://www.betterhearing.org/news/don%E2%80%99t-let-unaddressed-hearing-loss-spiral-depression>)

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