

# Clinical Tidbits

...for Physicians

## Hearing Loss and Dementia

### Researchers at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine have discovered a link between hearing loss and dementia.

Hearing loss is independently associated with risk of dementia from all causes, including Alzheimer's Disease (1). Results show that the risk of incident dementia is roughly doubled in those with even mild hearing loss. The risk with moderate hearing loss is tripled, and the risk for severe hearing loss is quintupled. The results are part of a prospective study of 639 people undertaken as part of the Baltimore Longitudinal Study on Aging. The participants were dementia free at the beginning of the study, and hearing testing was done over a median follow up time of 12 years. Hearing loss retained a robust association with dementia after adjusting for age, sex, race, education, diabetes mellitus, smoking, and hypertension. Further studies are planned to help determine if hearing loss is an early marker of dementia, or if it is a modifiable risk factor. One theory is that the social isolation and depression reported by those with hearing loss (2) may increase risk of dementia.

1. Frank R. Lin, MD PhD, et al. Hearing Loss and Incident Dementia. Arch Neurol. 2011 February; 68(2): 214–220.

2. National Counsel on Aging Survey. The Consequences of Untreated Hearing Loss in Older Adults. May 1999.



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