

Hearing Loss and the risk for Dementia

Giorgos Dritsakis and Michael Hornberger
Norwich Medical School, University of East Anglia

It has been shown that hearing loss in midlife increases the risk for cognitive decline and even dementia later in life. Also, there is some evidence that use of hearing aids can minimise those risks.

Researchers at the University of East Anglia in collaboration with Hear for Norfolk ran a study to understand the views of hearing aid users on the link between hearing loss and cognitive health. Cognitive health includes aspects such as memory, attention and decision-making.

Specifically, the researchers interviewed 4 hearing aid users aged 57-65 and 2 audiologists. The topics included use of hearing aids, the future risk of dementia and expectations from cognitive assessment. Before the interviews all participants completed online cognitive tests.

What they found was that hearing aid users are generally not aware about the risk of cognitive decline and the potential benefit of hearing aids, but they would like to be informed about it. Both hearing aid users and audiologists believe that the risk of cognitive decline would strongly encourage people to use HAs.

“That’s a very strong motivator. I don’t think all people always understand what cognitive decline is but everyone knows what dementia is. So yeah, I think when we mention it is very much a strong motivator for having a HA.” (Audiologist)

“I think just the knowledge that if you if you need a HA and you use a HA then may well reduce your likelihood of dementia or other forms of sort of cognitive decline, I think that in itself is a very powerful message.” (Hearing aid user)

Hearing aid users and audiologists agreed that it is possible to include online cognitive assessment as part of hearing aid assessment and fitting as long as the reason and expectations are clearly explained. Cognitive tests could be used to self-monitor cognitive health. Audiologists could also use the results of cognitive tests to offer more counselling and support.

*“Yeah, you can monitor your own cognitive health. It's a bit better than doing a brain training app on the on your phone.”
(Hearing aid user)*

These findings will help researchers develop a future study to further explore how we can raise awareness about the potential benefits of hearing aids and use online cognitive screening in audiology clinics.

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Dr Giorgos Dritsakis is a Senior Research Associate at the University of East Anglia and the University of Cambridge

Michael Hornberger is a Professor of Applied Dementia Research at the Norwich Medical School, University of East Anglia

To find out more or to express an interest in participating in our research in the future please contact: Aliona Derrett, Chief Executive Officer at Hear for Norfolk by e-mailing aliona.derrett@hearfornorfolk.org.uk