

Physical Activity and Hearing Health



Hearing loss ranks as the third most prevalent disability in the US. Hearing loss significantly impacts individuals and society. The World Health Organization estimates approximately one-third of hearing losses are caused by preventable factors. Recent research indicates that one such factor, physical activity level, is related to hearing loss.

5 facts about the relationship between physical activity and hearing health.

#1

Active people tend to have better hearing

A prospective cohort of 27,537 adults (age 20–80) followed over ~6 years found those reporting moderate and high leisure-time activity had lower risk of objectively measured hearing loss vs. inactive individuals. High activity (≥ 525 MET-min/week) reduced incidence by ~13 %. (Kawakami, et al 2022).

#2

People in better condition tend to have better hearing

In 21,907 participants, followed over approximately 6 years, those with better muscular and physical performance—especially vertical jump height and singleleg balance—had a lower incidence of hearing loss. Mechanisms may include enhanced vascular, inflammatory, and neural health in the cochlea. Kawakami, Ryoko et al. (2021).

#3

Hearing loss in older adults is linked to hearing loss

Using accelerometer data, researchers found that hearing loss in older adults is independently associated with lower levels of moderate-to-vigorous and light physical activity, a more sedentary lifestyle, and more fragmented activity. Mild and moderate hearing loss corresponded to patterns typically seen in individuals 6 and 7 years older, respectively. (Kuo, et al 2021).

#4

Hearing loss may be a harbinger of a decline in physical activity

Individuals reporting hearing loss experienced **faster declines in physical activity over time** indicating a bidirectional relationship where hearing decline precedes reduced activity. (Goodwin et al 2023).

#5

Hearing aids alone may improve communication in everyday listening but they do not automatically increase physical activity in older adults unless paired with additional supportive strategies from an audiologist.

A 3-year randomized trial compared a hearing intervention (e.g., hearing aids/rehab) with general health education. The intervention did not significantly alter rates of moderate-to-vigorous activity, walking, or TV viewing. This suggests that hearing improvement alone may not be enough to change activity levels without additional behavior change strategies. (Martinez-Amezcua et al 2025).



Physical Activity and Hearing Health (Continued)

KEY POINTS

Higher leisure-time activity levels and better physical fitness are consistently associated with a lower risk of acquiring hearing loss.

Interventions that combine hearing aids with behavioral counseling or exercise promotion may be more effective in maintaining or improving activity levels in older adults with hearing impairment.

ACTIONS

Besides encouraging individuals to stay physically active, individuals over the age of 50 should be encouraged to get a baseline hearing test from an audiologist. [The American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery \(AAO-HNS\)](#) recommends that all adults aged 50 and older undergo regular hearing screenings. This recommendation is specifically for those who haven't noticed any issues with their hearing and aims to detect age-related hearing loss early.

References:

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