

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 70.¹

"We found a significant association between hearing impairment and moderate to severe depression."²

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. Withdrawal tends to progress until the person 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. They 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."³

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.⁴
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.⁵
3. This same study found depression and similar disorders tend to worsen as hearing ability declines.

An increased number of studies in recent years are reinforcing the association between untreated hearing loss and depression. 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.

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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.⁶
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.⁷
6. Along with depression, patients with untreated hearing loss are known to experience anxiety, paranoia, relationship problems, stress, and other negative emotions.⁸
7. A retrospective study with 117 patients older than 65 years and diagnosed with moderate to profound hearing loss shows that older adults with moderate to profound hearing loss gain benefit from hearing aids or cochlear implants not only in terms of improved hearing function, but also in terms of positive effects on anxiety, depression, health status and quality of life.⁹
8. 36% of patients who begin wearing hearing aids experience improved overall mental health, while 34% increase their social engagement.¹⁰
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.¹¹
10. An initiative called Healthy People 2020 calls for an increase in hearing tests for adults between the ages of 20-70.¹²

"...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."¹³

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