



Keeping Mentally Fit by  
Treating Hearing Loss

Please join the Better Hearing Institute (BHI) in raising awareness of the link between hearing loss and dementia, and encouraging people of all ages to get their hearing tested during World Alzheimer's Month in September.

Below is a press release you can adapt for your practice and/or local community, along with sample media posts you can use throughout the month. A web banner that highlights the connection between hearing loss and dementia can be downloaded at <http://www.betterhearing.org/download-graphics>.

Let's do all we can to spread the word on how addressing hearing loss can help people stay socially connected and mentally fit. Thanks for taking part!

#### Social Media Posts

- It's World Alzheimer's Month. Hearing loss & dementia linked. Check your hearing @ [BetterHearing.org](http://www.betterhearing.org). <http://www.betterhearing.org/download-graphics>
- Dementia risk may be up to 5X higher with hearing loss. Check your hearing @ [BetterHearing.org](http://www.betterhearing.org). [http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/healthy\\_aging/healthy\\_body/the-hidden-risks-of-hearing-loss](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/healthy_aging/healthy_body/the-hidden-risks-of-hearing-loss)
- Dementia: Can we reduce the risk? Check your hearing @ [BetterHearing.org](http://www.betterhearing.org). <http://www.betterhearing.org/download-graphics>

#### **Keep Your Mind Fit: Check Your Hearing and Address Hearing Loss for**

#### **World Alzheimer's Month, the Better Hearing Institute Urges**

**Washington, DC, September 5, 2014**—Get your hearing tested and address hearing loss, the [Better Hearing Institute](http://www.betterhearing.org) (BHI) is urging in recognition of World Alzheimer's Month in September. As more studies show a link between hearing loss and dementia, BHI is raising awareness of the importance of addressing hearing loss to benefit overall cognitive function. BHI also is offering a free, confidential online hearing check at [www.BetterHearing.org](http://www.BetterHearing.org) to help individuals determine if they need a more comprehensive hearing test by a hearing healthcare professional. Today, roughly 360 million people worldwide have disabling hearing loss.

As world populations age, the push to find preventive strategies to protect against Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia is building. Already, we know that modifiable lifestyle behaviors—like exercising, maintaining a healthy diet, and staying socially engaged and mentally active—are important to all aspects of individual well-being, including cognitive health.

In fact, a number of studies indicate that maintaining strong social connections and keeping mentally active as we age might lower the risk of cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease, according to the [Alzheimer's Association website](http://www.alz.org).

Research shows that those who address hearing loss are more likely to be socially active—while individuals who suffer untreated hearing loss become more socially withdrawn and are considerably less likely to participate in social activities. ([Hearing loss might make elderly feel more isolated](#); [Hearing aids and quality of life NCOA](#))

What's more, eight out of ten hearing aid users say they're satisfied with the changes that have occurred in their lives due to hearing aids. Many see improvements in their social lives, in their ability to join in groups, in their relationships at work and at home, in their mental and cognitive skills, and in their effectiveness in communicating generally. [MarkeTrak VIII Patients report improved quality of life with hearing aid usage](#)

## **Recent Studies on Hearing Loss and Dementia**

A pair of studies out of Johns Hopkins found that hearing loss is associated with accelerated cognitive decline in older adults and that seniors with hearing loss are significantly more likely to develop dementia over time than those who retain their hearing. A third Johns Hopkins study revealed a link between hearing loss and accelerated brain tissue loss. The researchers found that for older adults with hearing loss, brain tissue loss happens faster than it does for those with normal hearing. ([Hearing Loss Accelerates Brain Function Decline In Older Adults](#); [Hearing Loss And Dementia Linked In Study](#); [Hearing Loss Linked To Accelerated Brain Tissue Loss](#))

## **How Hearing Loss Affects Cognitive Function**

Brandeis University Professor of Neuroscience, Dr. Arthur Wingfield, has been studying cognitive aging and the relationship between memory and hearing acuity.

Unaddressed hearing loss not only affects the listener's ability to "hear" the sound accurately, Wingfield says, but it also affects higher-level cognitive functioning. Specifically, it interferes with the listener's ability to accurately process the auditory information and make sense of it.

For instance, in one study, Wingfield and his co-investigators found that older adults with mild-to-moderate hearing loss performed poorer on cognitive tests than those of the same age who had good hearing.

Wingfield, along with colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania and Washington University in St. Louis, also has used MRI to look at the effect that hearing loss has on both brain activity and structure.

The study found that people with poorer hearing had less gray matter in the auditory cortex, a region of the brain that is necessary to support speech comprehension. Wingfield has suggested the possibility that the participants' hearing loss had a causal role. He and his co-investigators hypothesize that when the sensory stimulation is reduced due to hearing loss, corresponding areas of the brain reorganize their activity as a result.

"The sharpness of an individual's hearing has cascading consequences for various aspects of cognitive function," said Wingfield. "We're only just beginning to understand how far-reaching these consequences are."

"Even if you have just a mild hearing loss that is not being treated, cognitive load increases significantly," Wingfield continued. "You have to put in so much effort just to perceive and understand what is being said that you divert resources away from storing what you have heard into your memory."

As people move through middle age and their later years, Wingfield suggested, it is reasonable for them to get their hearing tested annually. If there is a hearing loss, it is best to take it seriously and treat it.

## **Hearing aids benefit people with Alzheimer's—and their caregivers**

BHI reminds people with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers that hearing health is an important factor in their quality of life. The ability to communicate with the help of hearing aids can help enhance quality of life for individuals who have both Alzheimer's and hearing loss—and their caregivers. ([Aging, Alzheimer's Disease, and Hearing Impairment: Highlighting Relevant Issues and Calling for Additional Research](#))

BHI advocates that hearing checks, hearing healthcare, and hearing aids when appropriate be included in the regimen of care for people with Alzheimer's disease. Identification and remediation of hearing loss prior to the evaluation of dementia also can help ensure a more accurate medical evaluation. BHI advocates that a comprehensive hearing examination and hearing healthcare be part of the diagnostic process.

For more information on hearing loss and to take the BHI Hearing Check, visit [www.BetterHearing.org](http://www.BetterHearing.org). Follow BHI on Twitter @better\_hearing, and on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/betterhearinginstitute>.