

New research links smoking and body mass index to hearing loss

June 10 2008

Smoking and body mass index (BMI) are risk factors in the development of age-related hearing loss, says one of the largest-ever studies into risk factors for hearing loss – but alcohol has a protective effect. The study has just been published online in Springer's *Journal of the Association for Research in Otolaryngology* (JARO). The results are also being presented at the International Society of Audiology Congress in Hong Kong today.

Led by Erik Fransen in Professor Guy Van Camp's research team at the University of Antwerp, the study found that smoking, being over-weight and occupational noise are risk factors in the most common type of hearing loss.

In contrast, moderate alcohol consumption (at least one drink a week) was seen to have a protective effect. In the study, one alcoholic drink was defined as one glass of wine, spirit or beer. The effect of heavy drinking was not investigated.

This large European study involved nine audiological centers in seven countries. A total of 4083 people between 53 and 67 years old took part. Participants filled out a questionnaire on their exposure to potential environmental risk factors and their medical history. Their hearing was also tested. The data were analyzed for associations between potential risk factors and hearing loss.

The effects of smoking and alcohol consumption have been studied in

the past, but previous research results were not conclusive. The new research also confirms that exposure to noise contributes to hearing loss in later life - exposure to excessive noise is the major avoidable cause of permanent hearing loss worldwide, according to the World Health Organization.

In view of these findings, Fransen and his colleagues conclude, "Hearing loss has always been considered an inevitable part of ageing, but more and more studies seem to indicate this is not necessarily true. Apparently a healthy lifestyle can be beneficial for hearing conservation at higher ages."

Source: Springer

Citation: New research links smoking and body mass index to hearing loss (2008, June 10)
retrieved 4 May 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-06-links-body-mass-index-loss.html>

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