

Hearing, voice problems worsen seniors' communication skills

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Hearing and vocal problems go hand-in-hand among the elderly more frequently than previously thought, according to researchers at Duke University Medical Center. Together, they pack a devastating double punch on communication skills and overall well-being.

"It's important to realize these disabilities often occur concurrently," says Seth Cohen, MD, an otolaryngologist at the Duke Voice Care Center. "And when they do, they can increase the likelihood of depression and [social isolation](#)."

Nearly half of people age 65 and older have some degree of [hearing loss](#), according to previously published reports, and about one-third of elderly adults have vocal problems including dysphonia, more commonly known as hoarseness. Taken apart, the disabilities have been linked in the elderly to increased depression, anxiety and social isolation.

In a study presented at the American Laryngological, Rhinological and Otological Society, (aka the Triological Society) in Phoenix, Cohen found that nearly 11 percent of the 248 participants with a median age of 82.4 had both disabilities. And, those respondents had greater depression scores.

While Cohen's study did not prove a direct cause and effect link between hearing loss and dysphonia, he says there appears to be a causal relationship.

"When people have trouble hearing, they strain their voices to hear themselves. Likewise, people may strain their voices if their communication partners can't hear." Because there is effective treatment for both hearing loss and dysphonia, he says it's important that people with one disability be evaluated for the other.

"We need to take a more global view of communication function in the elderly," he stresses.

Source: Duke University Medical Center ([news](#) : [web](#))

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