

Hearing loss affects old people's personality

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As people approach old age, they generally become less outgoing. New research from the University of Gothenburg shows that this change in personality is amplified among people with impaired hearing. The findings emphasize the importance of acknowledging and treating hearing loss in the elderly population.

The researchers studied 400 individuals 80-98 years old over a six-year period. Every two years, the subjects were assessed in terms of physical and mental measures as well as [personality](#) aspects such as extraversion, which reflects the inclination to be outgoing, and emotional stability. The results show that even if the [emotional stability](#) remained constant over the period, the participants became less outgoing.

Interestingly, the researchers were not able to connect the observed changes to physical and cognitive impairments or to age-related difficulties finding social activities. The only factor that could be linked to reduced extraversion was [hearing loss](#).

'To our knowledge, this is the first time a link between hearing and [personality changes](#) has been established in longitudinal studies. Surprisingly, we did not find that declining overall health and functional capacity make people less outgoing. But hearing loss directly affects the quality of social situations. If the perceived quality of social interaction goes down, it may eventually affect whether and how we relate to others,' says Anne Ingeborg Berg, PhD, licensed psychologist and researcher at the Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg.

The study yields interesting knowledge about [personality development](#) late in life, and also points to the importance of acknowledging and treating hearing loss among the elderly.

The utilisation of [hearing aids](#) did not affect the correlation found, which suggests that there is a need for support in the use of aids such as hearing devices.

'Our previous studies have shown that outgoing individuals are happier with their lives. It is hypothesised that an outgoing personality reflects a positive approach to life, but it also probably shows how important it is for most people to share both joy and sadness with others. Even if we can't conclude anything about causal relationships, we can guess that the link between hearing loss and social withdrawal forms a potential threat to older people's wellbeing,' says Berg.

More information: The study, conducted by Anne Ingeborg Berg and Boo Johansson from the ADA - Gero Group, Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, was published in February 2014 in *Journal of Personality*.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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