

# Hearing problems reduce the quality of life of older people

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Research has found that hearing loss has wide-ranging impacts not only on older people's ability to communicate, but also on their ability to move about and participate in different hobbies and activities. This has been revealed in studies funded by the Academy of Finland whose results have been published in international scientific journals.

"In our recent studies, we've observed that [older people](#) with hearing problems have a more limited life space, and that these problems lower their quality of life," says Doctoral Student Hannele Polku. Polku studied how men and women aged 75-90 living in the Jyväskylä region, a total of 848 [people](#), moved about within their life space. The study took account of the extent of the life space, times of movement and the assistance needed for moving. Life space mobility describes not only these people's ability to move, but also their opportunities to participate in events outside their homes. According to the results, people who experienced hearing problems in different everyday situations moved less within their life space than those who considered their hearing to be good. During the two-year monitoring period, the people who were hard of hearing were twice as likely as others to limit their life space only to nearby areas. The life space of those with good hearing, on the other hand, remained more often unlimited.

## Consequences of hearing problems not sufficiently taken into account

Earlier studies have suggested that a wide living environment, on the one hand, and good hearing, on the other hand, are associated with older people regarding their quality of life as good. There is earlier research evidence on the connection between hearing and quality of life, but earlier studies have not made any closer observations about the associations between hearing and various aspects of quality of life.

"According to our study, audiometrically measured hearing alone is not a sufficient measure of how people experience their hearing problems and how these affect their everyday lives. For example, a person with many everyday social contacts and communication with others may feel that even a minor [hearing loss](#) may affect their everyday functioning. On the other hand, a person more inclined to enjoy domestic tasks carried out on one's own doesn't experience the same number of problems due to a change of a similar degree in hearing," says Polku.

According to Polku, [hearing problems](#) should be identified and taken into account better than before, when the elderly seek healthcare services.

"Hearing problems are often considered to be an inevitable consequence of ageing, and for this reason their impact on the everyday lives of the elderly are easily ignored. For example, in the design of public spaces and functions, attention should also be paid to enabling the active participation of people who are hard of [hearing](#)."

The studies were performed at the Gerontology Research Center, jointly run by the University of Jyväskylä and the University of Tampere. The studies are part of the international project "Hearing, remembering and living well".

**More information:** Polku H., Mikkola T.M., Rantakokko M., Portegijs E., Törmäkangas T., Rantanen T., Viljanen A. Hearing and

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