

How hearing affects your brain health

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People who are having difficulty following conversations or are developing issues with memory and thinking skills may want to get their hearing checked. Age-related hearing loss may be linked to an increased risk of cognitive decline, explains Ronald Petersen, M.D., a neurologist and director of Mayo Clinic's Alzheimer's Disease Research Center.

Several large studies have shown that people who have a degree of hearing loss, even in midlife, have an increased risk of developing dementia later in life. The exact reason is not known, Dr. Petersen says.

"It could be that there are actually effects on the brain. Some studies have been shown that if people have a hearing loss over many years, certain parts of the brain, in particular the [temporal lobe](#) involved in hearing, but also involved in language and [memory](#), may actually be smaller," Dr. Petersen says.

It also could be that hearing loss leads to [social isolation](#), which can lead to an increased risk of dementia.

Dr. Petersen recommends getting hearing assessed every two to three years, especially if there are signs that hearing may be deteriorating. Those include difficulty hearing conversations, especially in crowded rooms, and asking others to repeat themselves frequently.

The solution could be as simple as having earwax removed.

"If in fact a [hearing loss](#) is detected that is more than what we would expect for aging, you could get a hearing device—a hearing aid or cochlear implant," Dr. Petersen says. "Hearing loss need not be a normal event in aging."

"We think that if people improves their ability to hear, that their cognitive loss—if it's related to that—might in fact slow over time," Dr. Petersen adds.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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