

# Poor hearing can cause mental health problems, says researcher

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Hearing loss can lead to anxiety, sadness and depression. Gerhard Andersson has been researching a treatment for those who have difficulty accepting hearing loss.

An estimated 1.5 million Swedes live with some form of [hearing loss](#), according to The Swedish Association of Hard of Hearing People. This group includes people of different ages, with varying degrees of hearing loss where [assistive devices](#) can provide different levels of help.

## **Life situation determines how the individual reacts**

"It is difficult to generalize about how someone will react to hearing loss. It is individual and the [life situation](#) affects it. Being 75 years old and being able to talk about testing hearing aids with friends who understand exactly what is going on is a different situation than being 26 years old and alone with the problem. And for those in midlife, the demands of the workplace have an impact," says Gerhard Andersson, a researcher at the Department of Clinical Neuroscience at Karolinska Institutet and Linköping University.

"I would like to highlight the biopsychosocial perspective. To understand how hearing loss can affect an individual, it is wrong to go only to the biologist to talk about [hair cells](#), only to the psychologist to talk about anxiety and sensitivity to symptoms, or only to the sociologist to look at workplace adaptability or social security support. You have to look at the whole picture."

## **CBT increases quality of life**

Gerhard Andersson has been researching various internet-based [psychological treatments](#) for many years. He has been involved in developing one treatment specifically for people with hearing loss. It is a variant of ACT, a type of CBT based on trying to change one's approach to the cause of the disorder. Finding out what is meaningful in life and how to maintain as much of that as possible, despite the hearing loss, is part of the treatment.

In a pilot study involving over 60 people, those who received the treatment became less depressed and described a better quality of life than those in the [control group](#). However, after this [pilot study](#), the treatment has not been further investigated and is not currently offered within the health care system.

"No, hearing rehabilitation today is largely about trying out different types of [hearing aids](#). Only a few of us psychologists work with hearing loss, which I find a bit strange—it is also a group that needs psychosocial support," says Gerhard Andersson.

## **Facts: Hearing affects your whole life**

It is well documented that hearing loss can lead to a poorer quality of life, with feelings of being limited and isolated in one's [social life](#). The presentation also includes low mood and depression.

It is also well known that hearing loss is a cognitive burden, where struggling to keep up with conversations can be very tiring.

Hearing loss is also linked to an increased risk of dementia. The link is so strong that early detection and treatment of hearing problems has been highlighted as the most effective measure to prevent dementia in a 2020 article in *The Lancet*. It is not clear why hearing loss increases the risk of dementia, but one hypothesis is that the brain is less activated when it is exposed to fewer sensory inputs, which has a negative impact on it.

Provided by Karolinska Institutet

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