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**During Brain Awareness Week, the American Academy of Audiology Points to Recent Studies on Brain-Hearing Connection**

Hearing loss in the U.S. has reached record numbers

**RESTON, Va., March 5, 2019—**Brain Awareness Week takes place on March 11-17, 2019. The week is a global campaign to increase public awareness of the progress and benefits of brain research.

Members of the American Academy of Audiology recognize the important connection between brain activity and hearing. In Dec. 2017, a group of scientists led by Jingkai Wei with the Department of Epidemiology, Gillings School of Global Public Health, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, [published a report](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5806170/) following their review of multiple studies on the link between hearing impairment and risk of mild cognitive impairment and dementia. The meta-analysis showed that hearing impairment is associated with a higher risk of mild cognitive impairment and dementia among older adults.

[A prior 2011 study](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/media/releases/hearing_loss_and_dementia_linked_in_study) by Johns Hopkins and the National Institute on Aging, with Frank Lin, M.D., Ph.D. serving as the study leader, focused on 639 people whose hearing and cognitive abilities were tested as part of the Baltimore Longitudinal Study on Aging. The BLSA, initiated by the National Institute on Aging in 1958, has tracked various health factors in thousands of men and women over decades. Lin’s study used a cross-sectional cohort of 347 participants older than 55 years in the BLSA without mild cognitive impairment or dementia that had audiometric and cognitive testing performed in 1990–1994. While about a quarter of the volunteers had some hearing loss at the start of the study, none had dementia.

These volunteers were then closely followed with repeat examinations every one to two years, and by 2008, 58 of them had developed dementia. The researchers found that study participants with hearing loss at the beginning of the study were significantly more likely to develop dementia by the end. Compared with volunteers with normal hearing, those with mild, moderate, and severe hearing loss had twofold, threefold, and fivefold, respectively, the risk of developing dementia over time. The more hearing loss they had, the higher their likelihood of developing the memory-robbing disease.

In 2017, the NIH National Institute on Deafness & Other Communication Disorders stated that [48 million Americans suffer some type of hearing loss](https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/listen-infographic). The numbers grow annually as do the numbers of Americans suffering cognitive decline. As the baby boomer population ages, more Americans are forced to face hearing health challenges. According to the National Institutes of Health NIDCD, approximately 20 percent of American adults aged 20 to 69 have some trouble with hearing and approximately [28.8 milion could benefit from the use of hearing aids.](https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/shareable-images/text-description-infographic-hearing-loss-and-hearing-aid-use)

“While we look forward to more studies and more research data, we now know that there is a correlation between hearing loss and dementia,” said Lisa Christensen, AuD, president of the American Academy of Audiology and with Cook Children’s Medical Center in Fort Worth, Texas.

Some signs of hearing loss may include:

* Suddenly having to turn up the volume of the television, radio, or stereo and having

other family members complain that the volume is too loud.

* Difficulty understanding people speaking to you and asking people to repeat themselves.
* Difficulty with phone conversations and understanding the other person.
* Sudden inability to hear the door bell, the dog barking, and other household sounds.
* People telling you that you speak too loudly.
* Ringing in the ears.

“Often people don’t realize that they have hearing loss and hearing loss is not just limited to aging populations,” explained Christensen, “Anyone suspecting a hearing issue should see an audiologist who will run a series of tests to determine the problem, if there is one, and will recommend treatment.”

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The American Academy of Audiology is the world's largest professional organization of, by and for audiologists. The active membership of more than 12,000 is dedicated to providing quality hearing care services through professional development, education, research, and increased public awareness of hearing and balance disorders. To find an audiologist, go to [www.audiology.org/FindAnAudiologist](http://www.audiology.org/FindAnAudiologist).