

New research shows hearing aids change lives and improve health

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Credit: University of Nottingham

Groundbreaking research published by a team from the NIHR Nottingham Biomedical Research Centre, led by Dr Melanie Ferguson, shows the life-changing impact of hearing aids for people with mild to moderate hearing loss.

Hearing aids have been around since the late 1940s and are widely used to help people to listen and communicate better and to reduce the physical and social impact of [hearing](#) loss. But there has been limited systematic evidence of the scale of the benefits of using them.

Now Dr Ferguson's research, "Hearing aids for mild to moderate hearing loss in adults," published by the internationally-renowned *Cochrane Collaboration*, concludes that using [hearing aids](#) has a large beneficial effect in enabling people with hearing loss to take part in everyday situations and to listen to other people. Hearing aids also have a positive benefit on the person's physical and mental health.

Dr Ferguson, a Consultant Clinical Scientist who specialises in mild to moderate hearing loss, carried out the research over the last three years collaborating with colleagues in Nottingham, Oxford and Surrey. The research, a Cochrane Review, is recognised internationally as the highest standard of evidence-based health research. Evidence was reviewed from all of the available clinical trials worldwide to determine how much

hearing aids benefit people's everyday life and their health. The studies Dr Ferguson and her colleagues, in particular Dr Padraig Kitterick and Dr Derek Hoare, reviewed involved over 800 people with an average age of 69-83 years.

Good quality evidence

Dr Ferguson explains that the research provides the clearest and most robust answers to questions as to how far hearing aids change people's lives: "It might seem obvious that hearing aids are effective, because they are in such widespread use. They are the main support offered to people with hearing loss to enable them to continue to lead their lives with as little difficulty as possible. But before we did our research there was very little up-to-date evidence to show the level of impact hearing aids have on a person's ability to hear and communicate effectively or on their general health.

"Our research shows that there is good quality evidence that hearing aids are effective in enabling people to listen better and to participate fully in everyday activities. There is also evidence that there are benefits to their general health from using hearing aids. So for the first time we are able to reassure people with mild or moderate hearing loss who wish to try hearing aids that hearing aids should be offered to them, and that using hearing aids have a number of proven benefits on their quality of life."

The research has been welcomed by leading hearing loss charities, who believe it will help to influence both policy and provision of hearing aid services in the future. Ayla Ozmen, Health Policy Manager at Action on Hearing Loss, said: "This research shows that hearing aids are hugely beneficial to the lives of people with mild to moderate hearing loss. The fact that this affordable, effective intervention has been proven to enable people to continue taking part in everyday situations is extremely important. At a time when

many local areas are proposing to cut hearing aids for people with mild to moderate hearing loss, this research further demonstrates what a vital intervention they are."

Brian Lamb, Chair of the Hearing Loss and Deafness Alliance, said the quality of research provides certainty for people with hearing loss about the most effective support for them: "Cochrane systematic reviews are internationally recognised as the highest standard in evidence-based [health](#) care resources. This Cochrane review on hearing aids for mild to moderate hearing loss shows that an objective, transparent and accountable review of the evidence finds hearing aids are effective for mild to moderate hearing loss."

It is estimated that around 11 million people in the UK are affected by hearing loss, a figure that is set to rise as the population ages. The World Health Organisation estimates that adult-onset hearing loss will be more common than diabetes and HIV worldwide by 2030. People with mild to moderate hearing loss will typically have difficulty hearing quiet sounds, keeping up with conversations, particularly in a noisy environment, and with moderate [hearing loss](#), will experience listening and communication difficulties in everyday surroundings. Hearing [loss](#) can also have an impact on [general health](#); it can increase the risks of falls or other accidents and is also associated with an increased risk of dementia.

More information: Melanie A Ferguson et al. Hearing aids for mild to moderate hearing loss in adults, *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* (2017). [DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD012023.pub2](https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD012023.pub2)

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