

Hearing aids may delay cognitive decline, research finds

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Although there are successful treatments for hearing loss, there is currently no successful treatment for cognitive decline or dementia. Credit: Shutterstock

Wearing hearing aids may delay cognitive decline in older adults and improve brain function, according to promising new research.

Cognitive decline is associated with [hearing loss](#), which affects about 32 per cent of people aged 55 years, and more than 70 per cent of people aged over 70 years. Hearing loss has been identified as a modifiable risk factor for dementia.

University of Melbourne researchers have tested the use of [hearing aids](#) in almost 100 adults aged 62-82 years with hearing loss.

Participants were assessed before and 18 months after having hearing aids fitted on their hearing, cognitive function, speech perception, quality of life, physical activity, loneliness, mood and medical health.

After 18 months of hearing aid use, researchers found [speech perception](#), self-reported listening disability and quality of life had significantly improved for participants.

Most notably, 97.3 per cent of participants in this study showed either clinically significant improvement or stability in executive function—their mental ability to plan, organise information and initiate tasks.

Women, in particular, showed significant improvements in working memory—used for reasoning and decision-making—as well as most other cognitive functions assessed.

The study also found more frequent use of hearing aids was associated with greater improvements in cognitive function, and women were much more diligent at wearing the devices than men.

University of Melbourne Associate Professor and Chief Investigator of the study, Julia Sarant, said improvement in cognitive function is something that is not usually seen in [older adults](#).

"Although there are successful treatments for hearing loss, there is currently no successful treatment for cognitive decline or dementia," Associate Professor Sarant said.

"This research is a positive step in investigating the treatment of hearing aids to delay [cognitive decline](#).

"Further research is underway to compare cognitive outcomes from a larger sample size with those of a healthy aging comparison group of older Australians with typical hearing for their age."

This research is published in the *Journal of Clinical Medicine*.

More information: Julia Sarant et al, The Effect of Hearing Aid Use on Cognition in Older Adults: Can We Delay Decline or Even Improve Cognitive Function?, *Journal of Clinical Medicine* (2020). [DOI: 10.3390/jcm9010254](#)

Provided by University of Melbourne

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