



Hearing loss linked to mental and physical illness

Undetected hearing loss may be the cause of other mental and physical health problems in older Australians, according to federal government agency, Australian Hearing.

Even though hearing aids have been shown to increase independence, relationships and even life expectancy¹, people wait up to 15 years to take action.

This month the *Medical Journal of Australia* published a study showing that GPs rarely identify age-related hearing loss in their patients².

Hearing ambassador Dr John D'Arcy has added his voice to the call for GPs to proactively detect hearing loss in older Australians, saying that hearing loss is linked to mental and physical illness.

"Hearing loss has been linked to depression and illness such as diabetes and stroke," he said. "Hearing loss often causes frustration and a decreased quality of life, so it's important that GPs encourage patients to have a hearing check and manage a hearing loss effectively rather than wait to take action."

According to Dr Anthony Hogan, Research Fellow at the Australian National University, hearing loss causes a 20 per cent reduction in physical wellness.

"Of all physical conditions, hearing loss is considered the third most disabling, after chronic pain and restriction in physical activity," Dr Hogan said. "Hearing loss impacts a person's everyday experiences, from hearing the telephone to having a conversation."

"Hearing loss has also been linked with other physical ailments. A person with hearing loss is three times more likely to see their doctor than members of the general population," he said.

Dr Hogan's review of the published literature shows people with hearing loss report:

- elevated risk rates for diabetes and high blood pressure
- a higher incidence of stroke and;
- increased rates of heart attack and psychiatric illness.

According to Dr Hogan, hearing loss should be positioned as an important health issue to encourage people to seek help early.

Australian Hearing has developed a free telephone screening service, Telscreen to enable people to check their hearing without having to leave home. The service is available in English, Mandarin and Chinese.

Check your hearing over the phone by calling Telscreen on 1800 826 500. Age pensioners and veterans are eligible for free hearing services from Australian Hearing on 131 797.

Contact: Kate Dorrell, Australian Hearing, on 02 9412 6968 or kate.dorrell@hearing.com.au

¹ Apollonio, I, Carabellese, C., Frattola, L. & Trabucchi, M. 1996. Effects of sensory aids on the quality of life and mortality of elderly people - A multivariate analysis. *Age and Ageing*, 25 (2), 89-96.

² Schneider J M et al, Role of general practitioners in managing age-related hearing loss, *Medical Journal of Australia*, January 2009