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Hearing loss is important in dementiaAuthor(s): Ted Leverton

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## REFERENCES

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## LETTERS



## DEMENTIA

## Hearing loss is important in dementia

Ted Leverton *retired general practitioner, volunteer, Action on Hearing Loss*

Bere Alston PL20 7HB, UK

The useful clinical review on timely diagnosis and early intervention in dementia misses one important point—hearing loss<sup>1</sup>—which complicates dementia in three ways. It confuses diagnosis and interferes with support, and evidence shows that people whose hearing loss has been treated have reduced levels of dementia.

By the age of 70 years, 70% of people have hearing loss,<sup>2</sup> and many refuse hearing aids. Hearing loss causes difficulty hearing out of context words used in common dementia screening assessments.<sup>3</sup> I have seen people with supposed dementia whose screen test results returned to normal when hearing was corrected. A simple validated screening test is available over the phone or online.<sup>4</sup>

Denial, irritability, not understanding what is going on, withdrawal, and interference with relationships are common. Patients and carers are often unaware of simple tricks such as looking at the face, lowering voice pitch, and not raising the vocal volume. Hearing aids help but are not curative. They are difficult to use so should be provided as early as possible. Auditory pathways take time to adapt, so many give up using aids in the early stages, although such aids may delay development of functional hearing loss.

Hearing loss is independently associated with developing dementia and is associated with around a third of all cases. Dementia rates are progressively higher in people with increasingly severe hearing loss.<sup>5</sup>

Hearing loss also affects long term visual memory; it affects long term memory more than short term memory.<sup>6</sup>

Hearing aids improve cognitive performance.<sup>7</sup>

The key message is that hearing loss must be excluded at the earliest stage of assessment for dementia. This is crucial for timely diagnosis and early intervention. It is essential for supporting patients and families, and it may prove important for treatment and risk reduction.

Competing interests: I have hearing loss and undertake training sessions on hearing loss for health professionals.

Full response at: [www.bmj.com/content/350/bmj.h3029/rr](http://www.bmj.com/content/350/bmj.h3029/rr).

Useful link: Listen up—or risk losing your mind. [www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/community/blogs/our-guest-blog/listen-up-or-risk-losing-your-mind.aspx](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/community/blogs/our-guest-blog/listen-up-or-risk-losing-your-mind.aspx).

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tleverton@aol.com