

# Study finds hearing aid devices can help fight cognitive decline and dementia

by Leslie Ehrenberg  
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Another tool in the fight against dementia is right in your ear – or it could be – a hearing aid.

Rebecca Younk, outreach audiologist at Appleton Area Health, said in December of 2022, the Journal of American Medical Association published results of a study between the usage of hearing aids or cochlear implants and a decline in long-term cognitive ability and dementia.

“What they saw was a 19 percent reduction in long term cognitive decline with a use of hearing restorative devices. It was also found that hearing devices improved short-term cognitive test scores by three percent,” said Younk.

The participants enrolled in the study were followed for 10 years.

“What we do know is that hearing loss in the Middle Ages, those of us between 45 and 65, with hearing loss, that hearing loss is a significant risk factor for dementia,” Young added.

She stressed the impor-

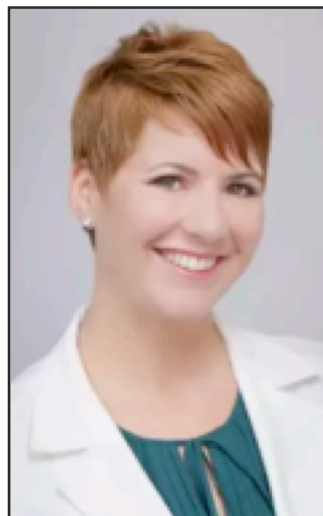
tance of hearing protection, especially for farmers, truckers, and noisy hobbyists such as hunters. “We are not always talking about hearing aids. We also want to talk about hearing protection,” said Younk. “One of the most impactful things you can do for your ears is to reduce your noise exposure.”

If you notice you are having struggles with hearing, such as not hearing background noise or if you feel everyone around you is mumbling, Younk recommends a baseline hearing test.

“When we do a hearing evaluation, we’re looking at a few things. First, just plain sensitivity. How sensitive are you to sound and what levels do we need to create sound before you hear. It is a threshold test,” explained Younk. “Then we test on how well you’re interpreting the sound that you are receiving. This consists of word tests in quiet and in noise.”

Once a threshold sound is found, it can help determine if hearing aids are something that can benefit from.

“Research shows the



Rebecca Younk

longer you go without treatment of hearing loss, we start to see impact on word understanding. That is one of the reasons why we encourage people to get a hearing test; to monitor their hearing and intervene when the hearing loss is to a point where it is interfering with your ability to communicate,” she said.

Individuals with Medicare Advantage plans may include coverage for hearing aids. Younk is always open to helping with insurance coverage and plans to use HAS funds and other options.

“Sometimes we do one ear a year, and then the other the next. Your provider will always help to try to find ways to make hearing aid devices affordable for you,” she concluded.