

Can Wearing Hearing Aids Prevent Falls?

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), injuries from falls cost \$50 billion every year—a greater burden on the healthcare system than obesity or smoking. If this trend continues, the CDC estimates that approximately 50 million falls will occur annually in adults over age 65 by the year 2030.

Like falls, hearing loss is also very common in individuals older than 60, with prevalence estimated between 33 and 40% in this population. Data from the National Health and Nutritional Examination Survey (NHANES) demonstrated that adults 40-69 years old with hearing loss were at greater risk of falls than their normal-hearing counterparts. Plus, the risk of falling increased 1.4-fold for every 10 decibels of hearing loss.

In the past, the relationship between hearing loss and falling was unclear. Some studies have shown an increased risk for falling in those with hearing loss, while others have not found a significant relationship between the two.

Recent Research Sheds Light on the Connection Between Hearing Loss and Falls

A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*



took a different approach to investigating this important issue.

This study differed from others that have looked at this question by limiting the study sample to only those with hearing loss. By doing so, the researchers were able to evaluate the association of hearing aid use and falls independent from the presence of hearing aid use.

Study participants included individuals 60 years and older with bilateral hearing loss who completed the Fall Risk Questionnaire (FRQ). They also answered questions about hearing loss

history, hearing aid use and other common fall risk factors. In this cross-sectional study, fall prevalence, as well as fall risk were compared between hearing aid users and non-users. A separate group of consistent hearing aid users (at least four hours of daily use for more than one year) was also compared with inconsistent/non-users.

Remember, the common denominator in this study was that all participants had hearing loss but not all wore hearing aids. Responses from 299 surveys were analyzed and found 50% reduced odds of

experiencing a fall for hearing aid users compared with non-users. Even after adjusting for age, sex, hearing loss severity and medication usage, those who reported any hearing aid use still had lower odds of falls and lower odds of being at risk for falls than the non-users.¹

Why Does This Research Matter?

With the increasing population of older adults and the well-documented burden of falls on the healthcare system, it's important to understand the controllable risk factors for falling, with untreated hearing loss now surfacing as one of those factors.

Furthermore, this research showed that individuals who wore hearing aids for at least four hours a day on average had a lower risk of falling. The researchers concluded:

- These findings provide cross-sectional evidence that is relevant to audiological clinical practice and fall prevention.
- Audiologists should discuss the association of treating hearing loss with the reduced risk of falling, as well as encourage consistent hearing aid use.

Summary

The researchers went on to call for healthcare providers to consider adding



“This research further substantiates the connection between hearing loss and fall risk, highlighting hearing loss as a risk factor that can be significantly reduced when an individual wears hearing aids consistently. Screening for hearing loss or referring patients for an audiological assessment could help identify those with hearing loss so that we can discuss the potential benefits of wearing aids, including reduced fall risk for these individuals.”

Tim Steele, Ph.D., CCC-A
President and CEO, Associated Audiologists, Inc.

an in-office hearing screening to their assessments for patients who don't have a documented hearing loss.

If you aren't comfortable performing a hearing screening, you can refer these patients to an audiologist for a comprehensive hearing evaluation.

An audiologist can provide appropriate guidance based on the outcome of the patient's hearing evaluation. If a patient is diagnosed with hearing loss, there are many highly effective treatment options available today, including prescription or over-the-counter hearing aids.

For patients whose concerns extend beyond hearing loss to vestibular

conditions, Associated Audiologists features the expertise of a vestibular audiologist with extensive training in the field.

References

- 1 Laura Campos, AuD, PhD; Allan Prochazka, MD; Melinda Anderson, PhD; Alexander Kaizer, PhD; Carol Foster, MD; and Timothy Hullar, MD. Journal of the American Geriatrics Society/Volume 71, Issue 10, p. 3163-3171. Published June 14, 2023; <https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.18461>.

About Associated Audiologists, Inc.

Associated Audiologists is the region's leader in audiological care for hearing loss, tinnitus/sound sensitivity and vestibular disorders. The practice has eight clinics conveniently located in Overland Park, Shawnee Mission, Prairie Village, Leavenworth, Manhattan and Lawrence in Kansas; and Kansas City and Independence in Missouri. Each clinic is staffed by doctoral-level audiologists who utilize state-of-the-art technology to assess and diagnose hearing loss.



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