

## Is There a Tie Between Hearing Loss and Dementia? *By Kim Lucas, MD*

Correcting your hearing deficit may help you reduce your risk of dementia. Researchers at Johns Hopkins followed 639 patients over a period of 14-18 years to see if hearing loss correlated with dementia. Some of the patients had



hearing loss at the beginning of the study, none had dementia. By the end of the study 58 people had dementia. They found that the greater the level of hearing loss the higher the risk was of developing dementia.

Individuals with mild, moderate and severe hearing loss had two-, three- and fivefold the risk of developing dementia.

The possible mechanisms may be that the brain has to devote too many resources to compensate for reduced hearing at the cost of other brain functions like working memory (which is a large factor in short term memory). Hearing loss also leads to social isolation,

which we know is a risk factor for dementia.

Dan Buettner, the author of “Blues Zones” a book about areas in the world with high concentrations of centenarians (people who live to be a 100) writes that social connectedness strongly correlates with longevity. He writes that people who are socially connected are “fun and rewarding to spend time with”. It is much harder to accomplish high levels of connectedness if you cannot engage in a conversation due to poor hearing as people tire of repeating themselves.

So what can you do? If family members complain that the television is too loud, or you find that people are “not speaking clearly” or you are avoiding situations because you cannot hear properly, it is definitely a time for a hearing check. In addition to testing hearing and prescribing hearing aids, a good audiologist can coach you on strategies on how to hear better and make the best use of your hearing aids.

One of the chief barriers to hearing aids is vanity and cost. However when compared to the cost and dependency of dementia, hearing aids are a bargain and have immediate rewards. If you would like your hearing checked ask your doctor or simply schedule an appointment with Thunderbird Internal Medicine’s audiologist Dr. Deborah Blaylock.

### Online Patient Login Enhances Access

Our practice website, [www.thunderbirdim.com](http://www.thunderbirdim.com), offers more and more services through our Patient Login. By clicking the icon and completing the registration, you can:

- schedule an appointment with your physician
- view an upcoming scheduled appointment
- request a referral for a specialist
- review billing history and pay an outstanding balance
- request a pharmacy refill

The website has a plethora of other uses as well. Elsewhere on the site, you can complete a patient satisfaction survey, subscribe to our health newsletter, obtain a medical records release form and find out more about the various services we offer. See you online!



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