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# SUMMER NEWSLETTER

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## NEW FINDINGS LINK HEARING LOSS AND COGNITIVE HEALTH

**Several recent studies reveal a clear link between hearing loss and cognitive disorders.** While cognitive disorders were once believed to be primarily linked to the natural aging process, new research shows other factors – including hearing loss – significantly affect cognitive health.

Several studies have been conducted on the link between hearing loss and cognitive disorders. In one, the U.S. National Institute on Aging and Johns Hopkins University monitored 600 patients for signs of dementia over four years, discovering that those older than 60 with hearing loss had a 35 percent higher risk of developing dementia than those with normal hearing.<sup>1</sup> Another Johns Hopkins University study found that cognitive abilities among those with hearing loss declined 30-40 percent faster than in people with normal hearing.<sup>2</sup> These findings coincide with yet another study, published in 2014 and led by Dr. Richard Gurgel of

University of Utah Health Care, who conducted research on more than 4,400 men and women ages 65 and older. This study showed that those with hearing loss at the beginning of the study developed dementia at a higher rate and earlier than those without a hearing loss.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, a long-term French study followed 3,670 adults age 65 and older over a 25-year period and found that individuals who treated their hearing loss with hearing aids experienced cognitive decline rates equivalent to those with normal hearing, while patients with untreated hearing loss scored significantly lower on a well-known test of cognitive function.

**With the right combination of early detection and effective hearing loss treatment, we can help patients regain control over their cognitive health.**

1. Lin FR, et al. Hearing loss and incident dementia. *Jama Neurology*. 2011; 65(5): 582-590.

2. Lin FR, et al. Hearing loss and cognitive decline among older adults. *Jama Internal Medicine*. 2013; 173(4) 293-299.

3. Gurgel RK, et al. Relationship of hearing loss and dementia: A prospective, population-based study. *Otology & Neurotology*. 2014; 35(5): 775-781.



## NEW STUDY SUPPORTS BRAIN TRAINING FOR SENIORS WITH HEARING LOSS



**According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), approximately one in three people between ages 65 and 75 experiences hearing loss.**

**For those over 75, the statistic is closer to one in two.** The term for age-related is presbycusis, which is caused by natural wear and tear of the auditory system.

The process of hearing occurs not just in the ears, but in the brain as well. The ears channel soundwaves and convert them to vibrations, which are transmitted to the brain via the auditory nerve for interpretation.

According to a recent study by the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, senior patients were able to improve speech recognition by exercising their brains with computerized games.

Throughout the study, elderly patients with hearing loss used a closed-loop (CL) computer audio game that had them listen for subtle changes in

“ **According to a recent study by the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, senior patients were able to improve speech recognition by exercising their brains with computerized games.** ”

sound to solve puzzles. At the end of the eight weeks, those in the CL group correctly identified 25 percent more words in background noise than those in the control group, whose video game did not include sound cues for the puzzles.

This is significant in the hearing industry as it may change the way audiologists work with their patients. There are a number of brain training programs already on the market that some specialists have implemented in their patient care, including Listening and Communication Enhancement (LACE), cLEARWorks4EARs and Angel Sound.

## THE LINK BETWEEN HEARING & YOUR GOLF SCORE

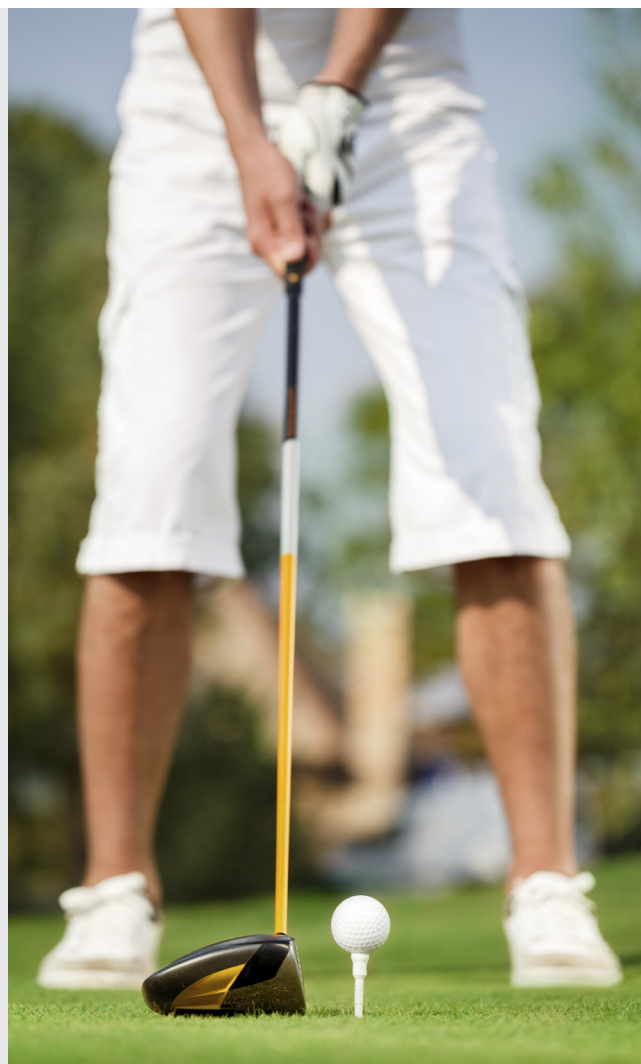
**The game of golf is filled with hazards. Bodies of water, bunkers and sand traps, and dense vegetation can all wreak havoc with your game. Another important yet often ignored factor that can affect your final score is your hearing.** Studies show individuals with strong binaural hearing (the ability to perceive sound with both ears) tend to play better golf than those suffering from hearing loss.

What role does hearing **play in golf**? An important one, it turns out. By paying close attention to the sound made when the club head comes into contact with the ball, golfers can control their shots better, in terms of distance and accuracy. Changes in tone and volume indicate a different swing of the club; by paying close attention to both the feel of the club making contact with the ball,

and the sound produced, golfers will naturally improve the quality of their play over time.

**Conversely, when hearing is impaired, the golfer loses the benefit of this additional sense.** Swings are less accurate, and scores tend to rise. Golfers playing in pairs or groups may have trouble following conversations, especially when there is background noise (e.g. wind blowing or a bumpy golf cart ride). This can lead to misunderstandings and poor decision making skills. Inevitably, when an individual is suffering from a hearing loss, he or she tends to lose interest in otherwise enjoyable activities. Having difficulty hearing while playing prevents them from being fully engaged in the game.

**Regular hearing evaluations by a qualified audiologist or otolaryngologist are a good idea for avid golfers.** The earlier hearing loss is detected, the more options you have for treatment and the better your odds for success.





# COCHLEAR IMPLANTS



**Whether you lose it suddenly or gradually over time, hearing loss can leave you feeling isolated from the rest of the world. While the majority of people with hearing loss can be helped with hearing devices, for some, even the most advanced and powerful hearing aids are not enough. Thankfully, with continued advances in cochlear implant technology, there may be a solution for you.**

A cochlear implant is an electronic device that mimics the natural hearing function of the inner ear for individuals with severe to profound hearing loss. A cochlear implant system has two parts: an external sound processor and an internal implant. Unlike hearing devices, cochlear implants do not amplify sound; they bypass the damaged part of the inner ear and send electrical signals directly to the hearing nerve.

Cochlear implants can provide relatively fast improvements over hearing devices for those with a severe or profound loss, especially in the crucial area of speech recognition. Studies have shown adults can achieve, on average, sentence understanding of 75 percent after using a cochlear implant for just three months and 80 percent after six months, compared to 13 percent understanding when previously using just hearing devices. Other improvements can follow, such as talking on the phone and enjoying music again.

It should be noted a cochlear implant requires significant therapy to learn/relearn how to hear, and even then individual experiences with the device vary. The process requires extensive time and practice with speech-language pathologists and audiologists.

A cochlear implant can help end the feelings of isolation and loneliness that often accompany significant hearing loss. You can once again enjoy activities you may have abandoned and reconnect not just to a world of sound, but to a whole world of enjoyment and opportunity. If you know someone who may be a candidate for a cochlear implant, ask West Coast Hearing Clinic for more information.

