

Untreated Hearing Loss & The Risk of Falls in Seniors

Recent research out of Johns Hopkins School of Medicine has suggested untreated hearing loss a risk factor for a very serious public health concern: falls¹

Facts & Stats

- Mild hearing loss nearly triples the risk of falling¹
- For every additional 10 decibels of hearing loss, the risk of falling increases by an additional 140%¹
- Individuals with hearing loss may have a greater risk of falling due to an increase in cognitive load involved with listening. When more brain power is used to compensate for missed sounds, there may be fewer cognitive resources to help with maintaining balance and gait¹
- Decreased hearing sensitivity limits access to auditory cues that are needed for environmental awareness. Thus, certain warning signals may not be heard, making tripping and falling more likely¹
- In one study, individuals with hearing loss performed better on standard balance tests when their hearing aids were turned on, compared to when they were turned off.² The results suggest that hearing aids may be a novel treatment modality for imbalance in older adults with hearing loss

What You Can Do To Help

Falls among seniors are preventable; however, their multifactorial nature means that addressing this growing public health problem is a shared responsibility.³ When it comes to the health and safety of our older patients, the importance of balance cannot be ignored.

We now know that sound information plays a much larger role in maintaining balance than what was previously thought. Please share this information with your senior patients, and encourage them to get an annual hearing assessment. If hearing aids are recommended, reinforce the importance of consistent use on brain health. Concerns relating to untreated hearing loss and falls can be minimized with properly fit hearing aids that improve hearing sensitivity, and reduce the overall cognitive demand on the brain.¹

References

1 Lin FR et al. Arch Intern Med. 2012; 172(4): 369-371

2 Rumalla KA et al. Laryngoscope. 2015; 125(3): 720-723

3 Public Health Agency of Canada. Seniors' Falls in Canada: Second Report

http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/publications/public/injury-blessure/seniors_falls-chutes_aines/assets/pdf/seniors_falls-chutes_aines-eng.pdf



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