

Hearing Aids Can Help Prevent Cognitive Decline

By Lauren Johnson

Hearing loss does not directly cause cognitive decline or mental health issues, but there are strong correlations between them. Leah Kavanagh, Au.D., CCC-A, an audiologist with ENT Associates of Alabama, has seen firsthand how patients suffering from hearing loss have benefited from treatment and technology like hearing aids. Kavanagh specializes in adult and pediatric diagnostics, tinnitus management, and fits patients with hearing aids.

“Research shows that hearing loss can result in reduced audibility and reduced auditory input into the parts of our brain that are important for hearing, and that can change how the brain functions,” Kavanagh said. “When your hearing loss isn’t treated through something like hearing aids, there’s an increased listening effort, so hearing conversations gets more difficult. That in turn can use up more of our cognitive resources in our brain.”

This can put patients at greater risk for dementia, cognitive decline and depression. Hearing loss can also mimic dementia. Instead of a memory issue, the individual either misheard the conversation or never heard it at all.



Leah Kavanagh, Au.D., CCC-A

People with untreated hearing loss tend to isolate themselves and withdrawal from social interactions to avoid embarrassment. Kavanagh has heard many patients say they’ve stopped participating in activities they enjoy or going to events with friends or family because they have a hard time hearing. Isolation can cause a downward spiral leading to depression and sometimes cognitive decline.

After being fitted with hearing aids, most patients return to their former activities and social events, and Kavanagh has seen improvements in their mental health.

“They don’t have those feelings of being embarrassed from asking for rep-

etition, or they don’t have an increased listening effort like they used to, so they’re not as tired once they leave different functions,” she said.

The most common form of hearing loss that Kavanagh sees in patients is sensorineural hearing loss, which is a permanent form of hearing loss that can’t be treated with medication or surgery. The best way to treat it is through hearing aids.

Over time, hearing aids have improved from technology to style and size. The two main types include one that goes in your ear canal and another that goes behind your ear. Among Kavanagh’s pa-

tients, the hearing aid that goes behind the ear is the most popular because it’s not as noticeable.

Other treatment options include cochlear implants, which are used for severe hearing loss, and surgery, which is an option for a patient with a bone or tympanic membrane (eardrum) issue.

“Another complaint we hear a lot is tinnitus or ringing in the ears. That goes hand in hand with hearing loss. Hearing aids can help not only with hearing loss, but the tinnitus as well. It’s not going to get rid of the ringing in the ears, but it kind of tricks your brain into not perceiv-

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 8)



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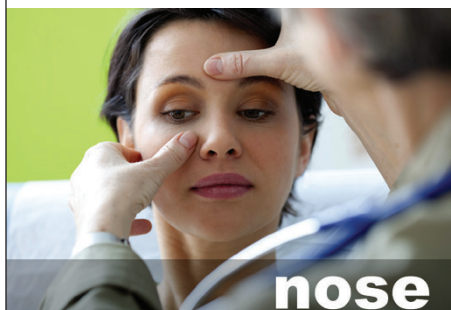
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FDA, HHS Taking Action Against Telehealth's Compounded Drug Advertising, *continued from page 7*

actions against telehealth providers is likely and, as a result, telehealth providers should closely evaluate their compliance with FDA requirements and other applicable laws.

Specifically, telehealth companies and providers, even those outside of the GLP-1 space, should ensure their marketing materials, websites and statements about the products and services offered are truthful, not misleading and can be substantiated. Though the FDA's misbranding laws and regulations traditionally fell within a gray area when applied to compound pharmacies, this latest action appears to show the FDA's intent

to enforce the rigorous advertising and marketing standards that apply to pharmaceutical manufacturers. These entities should also understand and appreciate the broader risks for compounding these drugs, including the applicability of state practice of medicine and pharmacy laws, including corporate practice of medicine, scope of practice, freedom of choice of pharmacy, and prescriptive authority requirements and restrictions.

Sara Klock is an associate and Michael Werner is a partner in Holland & Knight's Washington, D.C., office. Jennifer Rangel and Melissa Wong are partners based in Holland & Knight's Austin, Texas, and Boston offices, respectively.

Hearing Aids Can Help Prevent Cognitive Decline, *continued from page 1*

ing it to be as loud or as noticeable," Kavanagh said.

Hearing aids range in price, starting around \$2,000 depending on what the patient needs. Kavanagh encourages patients not to let the cost prevent them from moving forward with treatment as she can help find something that will work within any budget.

"Statistics from the American Speech and Hearing Association show there are about 48 million Americans with some degree of hearing loss across all life spans,

kids to adults, and that number is only going to increase given the age demographic of the U.S.," Kavanagh said. "As our baby boomers get older, we're going to see that number grow. One thing I tell a lot of people is that if we're lucky to live long enough, we're all going to have some degree of hearing loss."

She recommends those over the age of 50 to get a baseline hearing test as most people start to experience hearing loss around the age of 60.

Which Method For Major Weight Loss?, *continued from page 1*

make surgery difficult. That's when the help they need may be in the form of GLP-1 injections.

"I'm going to be offering GLP-1s to give my patients a full range of options. I'll start with the one that research is showing offers the greatest potential for weight loss. If patients experience side effects, we can switch to another," Long said. "In the next couple of years, we're expecting even better medications to become available.

"The injections help to slow emptying of the stomach and reduce appetite. Some patients may experience side effects

such as diarrhea, constipation or bloating, though these may ease as they become accustomed to the medication.

"For all my patients, whether surgical or medical, I suggest building good habits in both eating and activity so they achieve the best results for their efforts and hold on to that success as long as possible."

Lap-band certified, Long is fellowship-trained in minimally invasive and bariatric surgery and practices with Birmingham Minimally Invasive Surgery PC on Medical Park Drive near UAB St. Vincent's East.



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