Poorly Managed Diabetes May Cause Hearing Loss in Older Women

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Elderly female diabetics with poorly managed blood sugar levels were more likely to suffer from hearing loss than both women with well-controlled diabetes and women who didn't have the illness, according to a new study presented at the Triological Society's Combined Sections Meeting in Miami and reported by HealthDay.

Diabetes is a blood sugar disease and one of the leading causes of death and disability in the United States. The condition affects almost 26 million Americans. And nearly 25 percent of African Americans between ages 65 and 74 have diabetes. The condition is known to affect the kidneys, eyes and other organs.

For the study, researchers at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit examined the hearing test results of 990 women and men of varying ages who had hearing tests between 2000 and 2008. Scientists split diabetic participants into two groups: those with well-controlled and those with poorly controlled diabetes. There was also a control group of participants who did not have diabetes.

Findings showed that among women, ages 60 to 75, with well-controlled diabetes, hearing loss was 14 percent worse when compared with women in that age group who didn't have the condition. (This amount of loss, the researchers noted, is not clinically significant and might not even be noticed by the individuals.) But for women in the same age group with poorly controlled diabetes, hearing loss was 28 percent worse than for those without the condition.

Interestingly, findings showed women younger than 60 with diabetes didn't fare as well. Whether their diabetes was well-managed or not, they were more likely than those without the condition to suffer hearing loss.

As for diabetes and hearing loss in men, scientists found no link, whether or not their condition was well- or poorly managed. Since men tend to have higher levels of hearing loss anyway, this may hide diabetes' effect on the disability, researchers said.

But the bottom line is, scientists suggested those with diabetes always properly manage their condition. People can generally control diabetes through exercise, being attentive to a low-calorie diet and by regulating blood-glucose levels with medicine, including insulin.

According to Kathleen Yaremchuk, MD, chairwoman of the Department of Otolaryngology at the Henry Ford Healthcare System in Detroit, scientists are still studying whether it's possible to reverse the hearing loss diabetics suffer. "We do not know if losing weight and improving control of diabetes will reverse the hearing loss that is seen," she said. "However, it will stop progression of the hearing loss."

Currently, doctors recommend that diabetics get their eyes checked each year. Some now say that these study findings suggest that people with diabetes may also need to get their hearing checked.

Click here to read about why calorie reduction is key for diabetics' weight loss.

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