



**October is National
Protect Your Hearing Month**

How to Improve Brain Health

Age-related hearing loss is the third most common chronic condition in older adults. And up to 8% of dementia cases are estimated to be associated with hearing loss in some fashion.

DID YOU HEAR?



Geriatric medicine specialist Ronan Factora, MD, helps us understand the connection that occurs between our auditory system and the rest of our brain, while offering tips for increasing brain health. “The cause behind this link is unclear. But one theory is that hearing loss tends to cause some people to withdraw from conversations and participate less in activities,” says Dr. Factora. “As a result, you become less social and less engaged.”

A lack of stimulation results in a decline in growth, particularly in neural pathways needed to carry out a number of biological processes, memory function and more. This is why isolation can be particularly hard on older adults. Because this lack of stimulation can increase your risk of developing dementia, social engagement is one of the activities promoted to protect brain health.

Recently, the National Alzheimer’s Project Act (NAPA) Public Law was updated to add hearing loss as a modifiable risk factor for Alzheimer’s Disease and related Alzheimer’s dementia. The update also noted that hearing aid use reduces the dementia risk! **Hearing loss is now positioned as the largest potentially modifiable risk factor for dementia among the nine health and lifestyle factors.**

Four Ways to Improve Your Brain Health

As you age, whether you have hearing loss or not, your cognitive abilities tend to have a natural decline. Fortunately, there are things you can do to reduce the severity of the decline and make small improvements along the way.

Keep your mind active

Dr. Factora recommends that you engage in hobbies that help keep you learning or challenged. You may enjoy playing board games, playing a musical instrument or learning a foreign language. Any new activity that forces you to learn and increase your skill over time develops new neural connections in your brain.

Maintain a good social network

Social connections help keep your brain healthy as you age. So it is important to maintain good relationships with friends and family. “If you’re constantly engaged in a give-and-take conversation and are around a lot of people, that stimulation will have a positive effect on your brain health,” encourages Dr. Factora.

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DID YOU KNOW?

A common little moth turns out to have the best ears in the animal kingdom.

Researchers from the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland, determined that the greater wax moth, which is brown and feeds on honeycomb, is capable of sensing sound frequencies of up to 300 kilohertz. Humans can hear up to 20 kilohertz.

The researchers believe the greater wax moth, which is the only species in its genus *Galleria*, may have evolved such extreme hearing in order to avoid their major predator: bats. Bats use high-frequency echolocation in order to find prey, but if moths can hear these calls they have a better chance of escaping. Some bats are capable of making calls around 100 kHz and hearing frequencies slightly over 200kHz....still far below that of the greater wax moth.



How We Got Addicted to Using Q-tips the Wrong Way



Every Q-tips box has a warning label: “Do not insert swabs into ear canal.” And if you are going to use it to clean your ears, gently swab the outer part only. But extracting wax from our ear canals is precisely why most of us buy Q-tips in the first place. The humble Q-tip was so perfectly designed for this purpose that it turned into a generic word for a product. Yet, somehow, we use it for the very thing it specifically warns us not to do.

Q-Tips Baby Gays

The origins of this strange consumer phenomenon can be traced to Leo Gerstenzang, an immigrant from Poland. In 1923, Gerstenzang thought he could improve upon his wife Ziuta’s method of wrapping a wad of cotton around a toothpick to clean their newborn daughter Betty’s eyes, ears, belly button and other sensitive areas during bathing.

Gerstenzang started a company that year to develop and manufacture the first ready-made sterilized cotton swabs for baby care. Over the next couple of years, he worked to design a machine that could produce swabs “untouched by human hands.”

“Baby Betty Gays” was the original working name for the swabs because daughter Betty laughed when her parents tickled her with them, according to her 2017 paid obituary. By the time Gerstenzang put out one of the first newspaper advertisements for his invention in 1925 it was shortened to “Baby Gays.” Soon, Gerstenzang changed the brand name to “Q-Tips Baby Gays.” By the mid-1930’s, “Baby Gays” was dropped from the name.

There are competing histories to where the “Q-Tips” addition came from. According to a spokesperson for Unilever, the consumer goods conglomerate that bought Q-Tips in 1987, the “Q” stands for “quality” and “tips” describes the cotton swab at the end of the stick (the first swabs were single-sided sold in sliding tin boxes).

Adult Ear Care

Q-Tips never told us to stick swabs in our ear canal to clean out earwax. But, from its beginning in the 1920’s, it made ear care a key focus of its marketing strategy. This trained generations of Americans to associate it with cleaning there.

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Mid-century advertisements often featured illustrations of men and women cleaning their ears or their babies' ears with them, including one depicting a man removing water from his ears after a swim. Even Betty White appeared in television spots for Q-Tips in the 1970's and 1980's, promoting them as the "safest and softest" swabs on the market for your eyes, nose and ears.

Q-tips are almost addicting to use, in that it creates a vicious cycle, said Douglas Backous, a neurologist specializing in treating ear and skull conditions. Removing earwax creates dry skin, which we then want to scratch with — of course - a Q-tip. Sticking Q-tips in your ears also can damage the ear canal. Most people do not actually need to remove earwax because ears are self-cleaning. Inserting a swab pushes earwax deeper inside, he said, and "you're actually working against yourself by using it."

It wasn't until the 1970's, under previous owner Chesebrough-Pond's, that Q-tips added a warning about not sticking it in your ear. It's unclear what prompted this change.

The company has no details on why they did this, and our search of the records turns up no publicized case of anyone with a swab in the brain, the Washington Post reported in 1990. "Something must have happened, and Chesebrough-Pond's didn't want to be blamed." By the time Q-tips added that warning label, it was too late. Consumer habits had become impossible to break, and Q-tips controlled around 75% of the market for cotton swabs. "It was just accepted that that's how people were using it," said Aaron Calloway, the Q-tips brand manager at Unilever in 2007 and 2008.

So what should you use Q-tips for? The company has several suggestions. For decades, it has tried to emphasize the versatility of cotton swabs. During the 1940's, Q-tips were positioned as an essential tool for women's cosmetics and beauty routines. In the 1950's and 1960's, Q-tips began to tell consumers they were for more than just for babies or women — they were handy for just about any project around the house or in their lives. "For lubricating power saws and drills...guns and fishing reels...mending a tea cup and cleaning jewelry...antiquing furniture," read at 1971 ad.

Today there are no ears in Q-tips advertising. A spokesperson for the brand says 80% of consumers use Q-tips for purposes other than personal care.

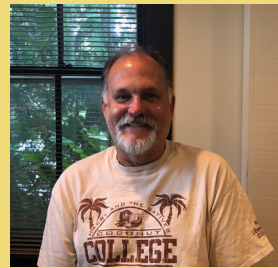
Exercise regularly

Exercise - particularly cardiovascular exercise - protects your brain as well, says Dr. Factora. He recommends getting at least 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise (even walking at a brisk pace) at least five days each week. "Other types of exercise, such as strength training, can be beneficial," he says.

Stick to a Mediterranean diet

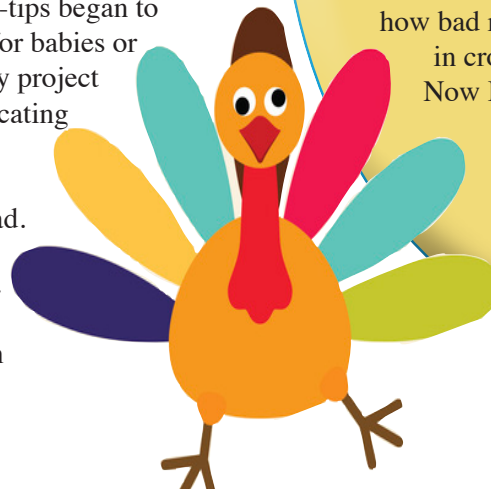
Eating right is also good for brain health. Dr. Factora recommends following a Mediterranean diet. This focuses on eating lots of vegetables and fruits, along with legumes, fish, olive oil, and nuts and seeds. "Not only is this type of diet good for your heart — it's also beneficial for your brain," he says.

Patient Corner



After using my hearing aids for 25 days straight on our road trip, I didn't use them one day after that....what a difference! I didn't know how bad my hearing really was, especially in crowded areas like restaurants. Now I am part of the conversation!

Amiel D.

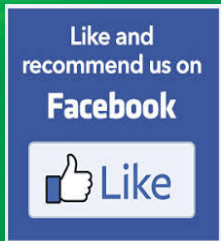


10TH ANNIVERSARY

As we celebrate our 10-year anniversary, all of us at Southern Vermont Audiology wish to convey our sincerest gratitude to our patients for entrusting us with their hearing healthcare needs. Our mission is to protect and improve our patients' hearing, which results in improved communication and quality of life. The best part of our day is meeting new patients, learning about their lives and communication needs, and providing them with a personalized solution.

Sincerely,

Kathy Shannon
Caryl Lisa



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