

# Having Senior MOMENTS?



We tend to accept the notion that as we get older our memory isn't what it once used to be. And while there is some truth to this, adults should not accept their 'senior moments' as a normal part of getting older. The best term used to describe the normal decline in memory as we age is *mild forgetfulness* – which is not a serious memory problem. Forgetting to pay a bill on time, misplacing car keys and even forgetting where you parked your car when you leave the shopping plaza are all normal signs of aging (and can even happen to younger folks).

There is a simple correlation between forgetfulness and aging, but when the forgetfulness outpaces your age and begins to impact your daily life and others around you, that is cause for concern. Dr. Keith N. Darrow, a Clinical Audiologist and Neuroscientist has been studying the impact of hearing loss, another fact-of-life for older adults, and its impact on memory decline for nearly 20+ years.

Darrow explains, *"hearing loss is the third most common chronic condition impacting adults over the age of 60 years young and can increase the risk of cognitive decline and dementia by 200-500%. This correlation is cause for serious alarm in the 42 million people living with untreated hearing loss"*. His network of Excellence In Audiology certified centers include both hearing specialist and certified dementia practitioners who understand the underlying links of hearing loss and dementia and work every day to help reduce their patients' risk.

*"While hearing loss and dementia are different, they share the underlying characteristics of being progressive - meaning they get worse over time - and degenerative, indicating that the nerves in the brain are breaking down at a rapid rate. Fortunately, the most recent reports from the*

*European Dementia Commission indicate that the medical treatment of hearing loss is the #1 modifiable lifestyle factor for preventing dementia, and it may slow the progression of the disorder."*

Although many people ignore their hearing loss, most are cognizant of their increase in senior moments that leave them with that gut-wrenching feeling that something isn't right. Darrow explained that *"common signs of early hearing loss and dementia both include asking the same question repeatedly, getting lost in places a person knows well, having difficulty following a conversation or following what others are saying, missing the beginning or ending when others are speaking to you and experiencing tinnitus - constant ringing in your ears or head."*

David B, one of Darrow's patients, knows from personal experience the embarrassment and worry that his hearing loss and uptick in 'senior moments' was having on him and on his family. His children finally decided that enough was enough, and they decided to have what they called a mini-intervention. They discussed how his hearing loss was affecting all of them and that they were concerned about his forgetfulness.

While searching online for more information, David's oldest son, Jared, found Darrow's newest book, **Preventing Decline, Advances in the Medical Treatment of Hearing Loss and Dementia**. Jared said, *"this book explained what my dad was going through to the 't', and we knew we had to get him the help he needed right away. I was encouraged when I read about the connections of dementia and hearing loss and how Dr. Darrow's treatment plan could truly help my dad."*

Understanding how hearing loss impacts the brain is what Dr. Darrow and his Excellence In Audiology certified centers



across the country focus on every day. Like many people David's age, he wasn't exactly excited to undergo a cognitive screening and full diagnostic evaluation of his hearing.

*"The challenge is helping families understand that their ability to hear directly impacts their memory. Ideally, we would treat every patient's hearing loss right when it starts, but with individuals waiting an average of 7 years to seek treatment, that is way too long, and by then it often impacts memory. Fortunately, treatment can help reverse the cognitive decline and has been found to reduce the progression of cognitive impairment." – Keith Darrow*

Once David got through all of the testing, the diagnosis was clear. He, like so many over the age of 60, was diagnosed with stage 3 hearing loss, and it was significantly impacting his brain by compromising his memory and attention skills.

As Darrow explains:

*"Although hearing loss is a natural process of aging and quite common in adults over 60 years young, even a mild loss is a major problem that can impact daily life, affect a person's memory, force someone out of their home, and even lead to decline and dementia. Fortunately, with advances in treatment, we now have the power to slow*

*down the progression of both hearing loss and memory decline."*

David and his family were told that once he started the treatment process, it would include regular check-ups, annual screenings and regular updates to his prescription but that they would all start to notice David's improvement in both his hearing and memory almost immediately.

David and his family know that hearing loss and decline aren't something that you can stop in its tracks, but they now have the treatment to slow down the progression of both disorders and they understand how important hearing is to maintaining memory and reducing their dad's 'senior moments'. David and his family urge others like them to seek treatment from a specialist that understands what families go through and how treatment can truly change their lives.

After reflecting on their own missteps, Jared, David's son, is remorseful that they didn't say something sooner to their dad, but they are forever grateful that they have found their dad the help he needs, and they are back to enjoying their time spent together. *"I don't wish this on any family, but now that I know there is treatment readily available for every adult. I can't seem to tell enough people how important this is."*



### **Dr. Keith Darrow, PhD, CCC-A**

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Dr. Darrow is a Harvard Medical School and M.I.T. trained neuroscientist and clinical audiologist. He is a professor at Worcester State University and Certified Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Care Trainer.