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Why Hearing is a Surprising Porthole into Preventive Health Care



What does ***the ear*** have to do with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and chronic conditions, like kidney disease?

In the past a hearing test simply told us how well a person could hear. But we now know there is a remarkable link between our hearing and chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cognitive decline. The ear can serve as an early warning system for metabolic changes in the body, signaling the presence of chronic diseases. With chronic conditions on the rise and accounting for a significant portion of healthcare costs, this connection holds immense potential for prevention and cost control.

18.2M

US Citizens have diabetes and that number is rising rapidly.

41M

Americans are at risk of developing pre-diabetes.

1 in 2

adults in the US have a chronic condition.

1 in 4

adults in the US have two or more chronic conditions

By recognizing the role of the auditory system in monitoring overall health, we can revolutionize how we think about preventive healthcare. The stria vascularis, a vital component of the ear, acts as a gatekeeper, safeguarding the cochlea while allowing necessary energy and blood supply. However, its cells can deteriorate in the early stages of chronic conditions, even **before** symptoms manifest. Audiologists, equipped with the ability to detect these changes, become

the first line of defense and invaluable allies in combating chronic diseases.

Let's explore a few key chronic conditions and their relationship to hearing health:

Cardiovascular Disease

Cardiovascular disease ranks among the top causes of death for individuals aged 18–64. Employers bear significant costs, with four of the top ten most expensive conditions falling under this category. Hearing loss, specifically low-frequency hearing loss, often precedes clinical symptoms associated with cardiovascular conditions. Early detection through annual hearing screenings can mitigate the impact of these conditions on both individuals and organizations.

Diabetes

Diabetes affects a staggering number of individuals, and many are unaware of their condition. People diagnosed with diabetes experience significantly higher medical expenditures and reduced productivity. However, regular hearing screenings can serve as an early warning system for diabetes, allowing for early intervention and effective management.

Cognitive Decline & Dementia

Hearing loss, even at mild levels, has a strong correlation with the risk of dementia. Research shows that a mild hearing loss doubles the risk, while a moderate loss triples it. For employers, this presents an opportunity to prioritize employee welfare and reduce long-term costs. Annual hearing screenings enable early prevention or intervention, helping employees maintain cognitive function and overall well-being.

To harness the full potential of this connection, employers must evaluate their benefit plans and consider incorporating annual hearing screenings as a fundamental component.

Accessible and affordable tele-audiology services make early detection and intervention feasible, leading to improved health outcomes and cost savings. Hearing health should be a cornerstone of healthcare, benefiting not only individuals but also the economy and society at large. By acknowledging the intricate link between hearing and chronic conditions, we can transform the way we approach healthcare and make significant strides in prevention and early intervention.

Tuned is a digital-first hearing care solution

Available as a standalone employer sponsored benefit, Tuned offers the only comprehensive hearing benefit designed to support employees of all ages from prevention to intervention.



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