

# Rheumatoid Arthritis

*Those who suffer are at a greater risk for Sensorineural Loss*

Source: Arthritis Foundation

Clinical trials have found higher rates of sensorineural hearing loss – a type of hearing loss usually caused by poor function of the hair cells in the cochlea – in patients with rheumatoid arthritis. For example, one study published in 2006 detected hearing impairment, which was overwhelmingly sensorineural, in 42.7 percent of patients with RA. By contrast, only 15.9 percent of the control group showed that type of hearing loss. Other, smaller studies have found similar results. Some evidence also links psoriatic arthritis and juvenile idiopathic arthritis with hearing loss (research on hearing loss in patients with Sjögren's syndrome have been inconclusive).

A 2006 Mayo Clinic study bucked the trend, finding no significant link between hearing and RA. However, it concluded that patients with RA were more likely to perceive that they had hearing problems.

The drugs used to treat the aches and pains of arthritis could also be to blame. A 2012 study published in *The American Journal of Epidemiology* found that women who took ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) two or more days per week were more likely to report hearing loss than those who rarely took the painkillers. And the more often women took either medication, the higher their risk for hearing loss. Women who used ibuprofen two to three days a week had a 13 percent increased risk, while women who took the medication six or seven days a week had a 24 percent increased risk.

This link between analgesics and hearing loss was generally stronger among women younger than age 50.

The researchers speculate that the drugs could reduce blood flow to the cochlea or deplete factors that protect it from damage. Earlier studies have linked regular use of aspirin to hearing loss as well.

The sooner hearing loss is treated, the better. According to two studies, untreated hearing loss may be associated with accelerated cognitive decline and brain atrophy. One study, out of **The Johns Hopkins Center on Aging and Health**, found that not only was cognitive decline faster among those with hearing loss, but patients with hearing loss were at higher risk for developing cognitive decline in the first place. A study out of the **Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania**, found that older adults with hearing impairment had lower density of gray matter in the auditory areas of the brain.