



## Research Article

# The Impact of Age-Related Sensory Impairments (Hearing, Vision, and Taste) On Cognitive Function, Social Interaction, and Quality of Life in Older Adults

Shubham Holge<sup>1</sup>, Krishna Deshmukh<sup>2</sup>, Priyanshi Shah<sup>3</sup>, Aditya Shah<sup>2</sup>, Shefali Shah<sup>4</sup>, Mohammad Arfat Ganiyani<sup>2\*</sup>, Pallav Kumar Shah<sup>5</sup>, Jimik Patel<sup>4</sup>, Ruchika Joshi<sup>6</sup>, Chiraag Ashokkumar<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Preventive & Social Medicine, Dr Shankar Rao Chavan Government Medical College & Hospital, Vishnu Puri, Nanded, India

<sup>2</sup>Department of Geriatric Medicine, Grant Government Medical College and Sir JJ Group of Hospitals, Mumbai, India

<sup>3</sup>Department of Medicine, Topiwala National Medical College & BYL Nair Charitable Hospital, Mumbai, India

<sup>4</sup>Department: Medicine, Smt. B.K. Shah Medical Institute and Research Centre, Vadodara, Gujarat, India

<sup>5</sup>Department: Medicine, Ashwini Rural Medical College, Hospital & Research Centre, Maharashtra, India

<sup>6</sup>Department of Medicine, Spartan Health Sciences University, Vieux Fort, Saint Lucia

**\*Corresponding author:** Arfat Ganiyani, Department of Geriatric Medicine, Grant Government Medical College and Sir JJ Group of Hospitals, Mumbai, India

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## Introduction

As the global population ages, age-related sensory impairments such as hearing loss, vision loss, and olfactory impairment have become increasingly common among older adults. These sensory impairments have been linked to a range of adverse health outcomes, including cognitive decline, social isolation, and reduced quality of life. As such, understanding the impact of age-related sensory impairments on cognitive function, social interaction, and quality of life in older adults is of significant importance.

Cognitive function is crucial to healthy ageing, enabling older adults to maintain independence and participate in daily activities. However, research has shown that age-related hearing and vision impairments can significantly impact cognitive function. For instance, hearing loss has been associated with an increased risk of cognitive decline and dementia [1], while vision

loss has been linked to problems with spatial awareness, depth perception, and mobility, which can contribute to cognitive decline [2]. Furthermore, olfactory impairment has also been linked to cognitive decline and dementia, although research in this area is still emerging [3].

In addition to the impact on cognitive function, age-related sensory impairments can also adversely affect social interaction. Social interaction is essential to overall well-being, enabling individuals to maintain relationships, participate in leisure activities, and receive emotional support. However, hearing and vision impairments can make it more challenging for older adults to communicate with others, leading to social isolation and loneliness [4]. Moreover, olfactory impairment can also impact social interaction, as it can reduce the enjoyment of food and other pleasurable scents, which can contribute to social withdrawal [5].

Finally, age-related sensory impairments can also

significantly impact the overall quality of life of older adults. Quality of life refers to an individual's perception of their physical, emotional, and social well-being. Hearing and vision impairments can reduce the ability to participate in social activities, leading to reduced enjoyment of life [4].

Overall, understanding the impact of age-related sensory impairments on cognitive function, social interaction, and quality of life is critical to developing interventions to mitigate the adverse effects of these impairments on older adults. This narrative review aims to provide an overview of the current research on the impact of age-related sensory impairments on these aspects of ageing. By synthesizing the existing literature, we can gain a better understanding of the complex interplay between sensory impairments and ageing and identify areas for future research and intervention development.

## Methods

### Search strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using electronic databases, including PubMed, Embase, and CINAHL. The search was conducted from January 1, 2000, to December 31, 2022, and included articles in English. The search terms used included "age-related sensory impairments," "cognitive function," "social interaction," "quality of life," and "older adults."

### Study selection

All relevant articles were reviewed for inclusion in the study. Inclusion criteria were: [6] studies that focused on the impact of age-related sensory impairments on cognitive function, social interaction and quality of life in older adults, [7] studies that included participants aged 60 years or older, and [8] studies that were published in English. Exclusion criteria were: [6] studies that did not focus on the impact of age-related sensory impairments, [7] studies that did not include older adults as participants, and [8] studies that were published in languages other than English.

### Data extraction

Data was extracted from the included articles and organized in a spreadsheet. The following information was extracted: author, publication year, study design, sample size, population characteristics, sensory impairments studied, measures of cognitive function, social interaction, quality of life, and main findings.

### Quality assessment

The quality of the studies was assessed using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale (NOS) for observational studies and the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool for randomized controlled trials. The NOS is a tool used to evaluate the quality of observational studies based on three aspects: selection of the study groups, comparability of the groups, and assessment of the outcome. The Cochrane Risk of Bias tool is used to assess the risk of bias in randomized controlled trials based on the following domains: sequence generation, allocation concealment, blinding, incomplete outcome data, selective reporting, and other sources of bias.

## Data synthesis

The extracted data was analyzed and synthesized to identify common themes and patterns across the studies. A narrative synthesis was used to provide an overview of the main findings and to draw conclusions about the impact of age-related sensory impairments on cognitive function, social interaction, and quality of life in older adults.

## Limitations

The limitations of this review include the possibility of publication bias, as only articles in English were included, and the possibility of selective reporting, as only studies that focused on the impact of age-related sensory impairments were included.

## Hearing Impairment

Hearing loss is a prevalent age-related condition, affecting up to two-thirds of adults over the age of 70 [6]. It has been associated with cognitive decline and an increased risk of developing dementia [7]. Several mechanisms have been proposed to explain this relationship, including reduced cognitive stimulation due to decreased auditory input, increased cognitive load to compensate for hearing difficulties, and shared neurodegenerative processes [8]. Hearing impairment can also lead to social isolation and loneliness, as older adults may struggle to communicate effectively and participate in social activities [9]. Consequently, hearing loss may negatively impact mental health and overall quality of life [10].

## Vision Impairment

Age-related vision loss, such as age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, and glaucoma, can also contribute to cognitive decline in older adults [11]. Visual impairment may lead to reduced engagement in cognitively stimulating activities, such as reading, writing, or solving puzzles, resulting in cognitive decline over time [12]. Similar to hearing loss, vision impairment can hinder social interactions and increase the risk of social isolation and depression in older adults [13]. Moreover, vision loss can limit older adults' ability to perform daily activities, leading to a decreased sense of independence and a reduced quality of life [14].

## Taste Impairment

Although less researched than hearing and vision impairments, changes in taste perception are also common with ageing and can have significant consequences on older adults' health and well-being [15]. Age-related taste impairments can decrease appetite and malnutrition as food becomes less enjoyable and satisfying [16]. This may contribute to cognitive decline by depriving the brain of essential nutrients and energy. Furthermore, taste impairments can negatively impact social interactions, as shared meals and food-related activities are crucial in fostering social connections and maintaining cultural traditions [17]. Taste impairments can also reduce the overall quality of life, as the pleasure derived from eating is diminished [18].

## Interventions

Given the significant impact of sensory impairments on cognitive function, social interaction, and quality of life in older adults, it is essential to implement interventions to address these issues. For hearing impairment, early detection and intervention with hearing aids or cochlear implants can improve auditory input, enhance communication, and reduce social isolation [19]. Furthermore, auditory rehabilitation and communication strategies, such as lip-reading and sign language, can also be beneficial [20].

In the case of vision impairment, timely diagnosis and treatment of eye conditions, such as cataract surgery, can help preserve visual function and maintain cognitive stimulation [21]. Additionally, low-vision rehabilitation services, including the use of assistive devices and environmental modifications, can improve daily functioning and promote independence in older adults with vision loss [22].

For taste impairment, strategies to enhance the flavour and palatability of food, such as using herbs, spices, and other flavour-enhancing ingredients, can help stimulate appetite and improve nutritional intake [23]. Providing education and support to caregivers and family members on addressing taste impairments and preparing enjoyable meals can also be beneficial [24].

Lastly, multidisciplinary interventions that encompass sensory, cognitive, and social components, such as sensory stimulation activities, cognitive training, and social support groups, can effectively improve the overall well-being of older adults with sensory impairments [25].

## Conclusion

Age-related sensory impairments, such as hearing, vision, and taste, can significantly impact cognitive function, social interaction, and quality of life in older adults. Early detection, timely intervention, and multidisciplinary approaches can help mitigate these effects and improve the overall well-being of older adults with sensory impairments. Healthcare professionals and caregivers should be aware of the complex relationships between sensory impairments and cognitive function, social interaction, and quality of life and incorporate tailored interventions into their care plans to address the unique needs of each individual. Further research is needed to develop and evaluate innovative interventions and technologies to enhance sensory function and promote healthy ageing in older adults with sensory impairments.

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