Abstract

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Serum Homocysteine and Folate Concentrations Are Associated with Prevalent Age-Related Hearing Loss.

Gopinath B, Flood VM, Rochtchina E, McMahon CM, Mitchell P.

Centre for Vision Research, Department of Ophthalmology, Westmead Millennium Institute, University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia.

BACKGROUND: Elevated total serum homocysteine (tHcy) concentrations associated with vitamin B-12 or folate deficiencies may adversely affect blood flow to the cochlea, leading to age-related hearing loss (presbycusis). However, only 2 small cross-sectional studies have assessed the link between folate, vitamin B-12, or tHcy and presbycusis.

OBJECTIVE: We aimed to determine both the cross-sectional and longitudinal association between serum concentrations of folate, vitamin B-12, or tHcy and risk of age-related hearing loss.

METHODS: The Blue Mountains Hearing Study is a population-based survey of age-related hearing loss (1997-1999 to 2002-2004). Presbycusis was measured in 2956 participants (aged >/=50 y) and was defined as the pure-tone average of frequencies 0.5, 1.0, 2.0, and 4.0 kHz >25 dB hearing level (HL). Serum concentrations of folate, vitamin B-12, and tHcy were determined from blood samples.

RESULTS: Participants with elevated tHcy (>20 mumol/L) concentrations had a 64% increased likelihood of prevalent hearing loss (>25 dB HL) [multivariate-adjusted odds ratio (OR) 1.64; 95% CI, 1.06-2.53]. Low serum folate levels (<11 nmol/L) increased the odds of prevalent mild hearing loss (>25-40 dB HL), multivariate-adjusted [OR 1.37 (CI 1.04-1.81)]. Serum vitamin B-12, however, was not significantly associated with prevalent hearing loss. Serum folate, vitamin B-12, and tHcy concentrations were also not significantly associated with an increased risk of incident hearing loss. Serum concentrations of tHcy and folate were associated with age-related hearing loss cross-sectionally, but no temporal links were observed, which could be due to insufficient study power.

CONCLUSIONS: Further, large prospective studies will be required in the future to assess these associations.

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