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Consumer Advisory Bulletin

"Listen Up!" -- for Tips on Buying a Hearing Aid

Four out of ten persons who buy hearing aids are less than fully satisfied, according to an industry survey cited by Consumer Reports magazine. But there are ways people can increase their odds of success.

Some people have trouble adjusting to a hearing aid and end up leaving it in a drawer after paying a substantial sum for it. Others have difficulty getting a device adjusted or replaced, or obtaining a refund if the hearing aid doesn't work as promised.

Here are some helpful tips if you think you may need a hearing aid:

- See your doctor first. Be sure you don't have a more serious medical problem, and get a professional opinion before you invest in a hearing aid.
- Shop around for a hearing aid dealer you like and trust. If you don't know where to start, ask your family doctor or friends to recommend a reputable dealer.
- Remember that hearing aid dealers in Iowa must be licensed by the Hearing Aid Dealer Licensing Board. They must pass a qualifying exam, be free of infectious diseases, and pay a fee. (There are no educational requirements to be licensed.)
- Be sure to ask to see the salesperson's license.
- Ask if the dealer will give you a 30-day trial period with an opportunity for a refund. Most audiologists who also dispense hearing aids offer such a trial period.
- Your hearing aid should fit securely and comfortably in or around your ear. Distortion of sound should be minimal.
- Hearing aids should work well in crowds and phone conversations. Your hearing aid should have an adjustable sound level; the loudest sound should not be uncomfortable.
- Select a hearing aid that is built sturdily. Make sure the hearing aid batteries are easy to replace.
- Know where you can buy batteries, how long they last, and how much they cost.
- Be sure you receive a written warranty and that you understand it -- especially any terms for returning the device and getting a refund. Hearing aid warranties vary from one manufacturer to another.

To find out if complaints have been filed against a seller or to file a complaint yourself, contact the Consumer Protection Division by calling 515-281-5926 or by writing: Consumer Protection Division, Hoover Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319.

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