



MEDIA ADVISORY
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THE TENNESSEE DIVISION OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS OFFERS CONSUMER PROTECTION TIPS WHEN CONSIDERING OVER-THE-COUNTER HEARING AIDS

Nashville- The Food and Drug Administration rules now allow the sale of over-the-counter (“OTC”) hearing aids. Consumers over the age of 18 may buy hearing aids directly from store shelves and online at lower prices. Finding the right OTC hearing aid may require consumers to try more than one device before finding the perfect fit, and consumers should carefully read return policies and be wary of very low prices.

The Tennessee Attorney General’s Office recommends keeping these key points in mind as you begin your search for an OTC hearing aid:

- **Refund period:** Look for the seller with the longest return timeframe. You may need a couple of weeks to adjust to a hearing aid. Getting the technical support needed to calibrate the hearing aid to your hearing loss may take some time.
- **Money back guarantee:** Understand the process for getting your money back. Do you have to use a particular shipping service? Who makes the determination that you returned the devices in satisfactory condition? Is there a restocking fee? What if you accept an alternate or upgraded device in exchange for the original device and decide that you do not want the alternate one? Will the company policy let you return the alternate? Be wary of a refund policy that seems unclear or unnecessarily complicated.
- **Compare prices:** Often, a consumer can find the same product at varying prices. You may be able to find the same product sold by a different seller with free shipping and a reliable return or refund policy. Make sure you are not being sold a cheap import that has been re-branded at a high markup price.
- **Read reviews carefully:** Some internet reviewers are paid for their reviews and may inflate their opinion of a product as part of their relationship to the hearing aid brand. Many other sites may appear to be scientific and reliable, but function as an infomercial for a specific company. Pay attention to what brands are being advertised or promoted on what appears to be an independent site. Better Business Bureau ratings provide helpful insight, but consumers should be cautious about relying on highly positive reviews when choosing a product.
- **Expert advice:** Licensed hearing specialists may be willing to help consumers find the right OTC hearing aid. They may help with consultations, fittings, and adjustments. Beware of online self-tests some vendors may offer that recommend their top-of-the-line device to every person that completes the test.

Finally, remember that OTC hearing aids are intended for adults with mild-to-moderate hearing loss. **Children under the age of 18 and adults with severe hearing loss should consult a licensed hearing specialist for appropriate hearing assistance device.**

If you feel that you have experienced consumer fraud, you may file a consumer complaint by visiting the Tennessee Attorney General’s website at www.tn.gov/consumer. For consumer inquiries or to request a complaint form, call the Attorney General’s Division of Consumer Affairs in Nashville at (615) 741-4737.