

HEARING AIDS

Hearing aids and batteries can be very expensive. To prevent a costly hearing aid mistake, make sure your hearing loss has been properly diagnosed. Your doctor may refer you to a hearing health professional for an examination and evaluation. It may be an otolaryngologist, an audiologist, or a hearing aid dispenser. Only two types of people are authorized to measure hearing loss and fit and dispense hearing aids in the U.S.: an audiologist and a hearing aid dispenser. Before you buy any product to enhance your hearing, it's important to understand the various types of hearing loss, the differences between a hearing aid and a personal sound amplification device, and what to consider when you're shopping so you get the product that's most appropriate for your particular kind of hearing loss.

A **hearing aid** is a small electronic device worn in or behind the ear. The device has three parts: a microphone, an amplifier, and a speaker. It receives sound through the microphone, which converts the sound to electrical signals and sends them to the amplifier. The amplifier increases the power of the signals and sends them to the ear through the speaker. The device doesn't work unless you have some ability to hear.

A **personal sound amplification product (PSAP)** is a device used by people with normal hearing to amplify hard-to-hear sounds. For example, if you are sitting at the back of a lecture hall, eating in a crowded restaurant, or bird-watching, a PSAP may be helpful. If your hearing is impaired, don't use a PSAP as a substitute for a hearing aid. That may delay the diagnosis of a potentially treatable condition, and cause more damage to your hearing.

Purchase Agreement. The purchase agreement for a hearing aid should include details about the trial period, the warranty, the total price, and whether a loaner hearing aid will be available during servicing or repair. People who can't afford a hearing aid should contact the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders Information Clearinghouse to find out about organizations that offer financial assistance.

In South Dakota, any purchaser of a hearing aid is entitled to a refund of the full purchase price less 10% within thirty (30) days from the date of delivery unless set by contract for more than thirty (30) days (SDCL 36-24-33). You can obtain a list of licensed hearing aid dispensers by contacting the State Board of Hearing Aid Dispensers and Audiologists at 605-642-1600.

SOUTH DAKOTA OFFICE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL

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