The Four Most Common Pitfalls of Buying Hearing Aids

Know the difference: Audiologist vs. Hearing Aid Dispenser

Most people are unaware that Iowa law makes it possible for almost anyone to sell and fit hearing aids. Hearing aid dispensers with very little training or background may provide services similar to university and medically trained Audiologists in the state of Iowa. Dispensers have no minimum educational requirements, not even a high school diploma is required, and no minimum training hours necessary prior to taking the state-required multiple choice exam. This means a salesperson with minimal education or experience can put on a white lab coat and give the appearance of authority. Many offices glaze over lack of provider experience by using general terms such as “hearing professionals” or “hearing specialists.” Just because someone wears a white lab coat, even if they are the business owner, even if you visit a nationally recognized franchise or household name, even if you see a person or location that has been fitting hearing aids in the community for many years, it does not mean they are university or medically trained with your best interest in mind!

Ironically, while Audiologists hold Master and/or Doctorate degrees, they typically have little to no sales training. As Audiologists, our extensive education focuses on evaluating each patient’s best interest and safety. We offer tactics to optimize your listening abilities, provide effective communication strategies for you and your family, consider additional assistive listening devices, such as amplified phones, and ensure proper long-term performance of your hearing aids through routine visits. When a medical concern appears or your lifestyle and/or hearing loss changes, we provide honest solutions rather than selling you an upgrade.

It’s important to recognize that you are not only paying for hearing aids, you receive value from your provider’s experience, abilities and follow-up care. Arm yourself with knowledge about the different educational levels and provider types available at the offices within your community. Audiologists are the only healthcare providers university trained and licensed to evaluate, diagnose and treat auditory and balance disorders. So while you may spend the same amount of money upfront, you receive completely different levels of training and education when comparing Audiologists and hearing aid dispensers.

Hearing aids as a product vs. a partnership

The selection of hearing aid style and technology is only one small piece of a larger whole that allows you to effectively communicate. Some offices opt to advertise only a product or low pricing, which confuses the public into thinking of hearing aids as no more than a simple commodity.

Hearing aids are complex medical devices that go hand-in-hand with your overall healthcare. The most successful patients understand that having hearing loss and wearing hearing aids is a long-term, ongoing partnership between the patient and Audiologist. Beyond the initial purchase, the pair works together over infinite years to continue fine-tuning, ensure maintenance of the devices, monitor progression of hearing loss or any medical changes and make adjustments to the hearing aids as your lifestyle and/or hearing loss changes.

Professional follow-up services from a properly trained healthcare provider are critical. Our university and medically trained Audiologists are uniquely qualified to guide you through this process. You are not a number or a sales quota. As healthcare professionals, we maximize the opportunity for patient safety and value your hearing as it impacts your overall health and quality of life during our long-term relationship.
Price as priority

We know your mailboxes and newspapers are full of hearing aid advertisements flaunting products and low prices. It’s unfortunate when franchises and salespeople, focusing on making a dollar, convince the masses into thinking of hearing aids as a simple commodity to purchase cheaply. There is far more to consider with purchasing hearing aids than initially meets the eye.

Realize that you should be shopping for a healthcare provider, not a particular product or cheapest price tag. Can you imagine shopping for the cheapest braces for your children rather than the most qualified and experienced orthodontist to install and manage them?

You will be satisfied not when you pay the lowest price but when you get the best value for your investment. Statistics show that people who purchase inexpensive hearing aids replace them with more appropriate and effective devices within two years, while those who initially invest in appropriate hearing aids, quality training and superior customer service replace them every five years!

Price shopping: Comparing Apples to Oranges

If price is your only focus, you’re doing yourself a great disservice. If you’re not looking at the bigger picture when comparing offices in terms of education, training, and follow-up services, you’re actually comparing apples to oranges.

In all honesty, hearing aid pricing within Cedar Rapids falls within an expected range, regardless where you go, in order to stay fair and competitive to the community. Regardless which offices you step foot into, every office provides entry-level, mid-level and high-end technology. One office may choose to use “bait and switch” or “low pricing” strategies to get you in the door, even though their pricing is practically identical to competitors who choose not to promote price.

The national average for a pair of hearing aids ranges between $4,500 and $6,500. In Cedar Rapids and surrounding areas, patients share finding pricing from $3,000 to a surprising $8,000 per pair. If you have a realistic budget in mind, any office can typically provide hearing aids at your price point if also appropriate for your lifestyle. Understand that pricing is generally the same regardless whether you obtain hearing aids from an untrained provider or doctorate level professional. Because of this fact, think beyond the initial price tag. Verify whether your provider will have the expertise to contribute to your ongoing success and follow-up care in order to determine the best overall value.

A FINAL WORD…

Don’t learn the hard way. With knowledge of the national average for a quality pair or hearing aids, determine your budget and concentrate on selecting a healthcare provider to achieve overall value. Since you’re going to pay a similar price point within your community, find an Audiologist that you feel comfortable who will provide the education, training, service, and ultimately, have your best interest in mind.

There is truth to the saying, “You get what you pay for.” With hearing aids, you really do get what you pay for. Think about your overall health and future happiness. Most people wear their hearing aids 18 hours a day, 7 days per week and 52 weeks out of the year. When you take the total price divided by several years of daily use… the cost is equivalent to a cup of coffee per day! Is not the joy of hearing your children and grandchildren, the fun of catching a good joke, and the confidence of knowing you are hearing the best you possibly can, worth every penny?