

WHO CARES:

*Sources of Information About
Health Care Products and Services*



A publication from the Federal Trade Commission
and the National Association of Attorneys General

INTRODUCTION

Every day, millions of senior citizens face questions about health-related products and services they see in the marketplace, get in the mail, read about in the newspaper and on the web, and hear about on radio and television. Unfortunately, it can be difficult for consumers to tell the difference between facts and fiction when it comes to selecting a health care product or service.

The Federal Trade Commission and your state Attorney General, as well as other agencies and organizations, can help you see through misleading or deceptive claims and protect your consumer rights.

The FTC and your state Attorney General have written this booklet to help you learn how to spot misleading or deceptive claims and where to get information—whether you're managing your own health care or that of a family member or a friend. We hope it will encourage you to ask questions and speak out if your instincts tell you that something about a health care product or service may not measure up to its promise.

HEARING AIDS



“My hearing aid doesn’t work too well. The dealer won’t repair it to my satisfaction, even though his advertisement said the hearing aid was guaranteed. He hasn’t given me a refund either. What can I do?”

More than 24 million Americans have some type of hearing impairment. Many people can benefit from a hearing aid, but not everyone. How will you know? The process begins with a careful fitting by a qualified audiologist or seller. Be sure to ask about a trial period when you can test the aid for free. Ask about guarantees and warranties, too. It’s important to get these in writing.

Regulations that cover many important aspects of hearing aid sales for consumers are enforced by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. One regulation requires that you are told about the need for a medical evaluation by a physician before you buy an aid; another requires that aids come with instruction books covering use, maintenance, and repair.

WHO CARES:

YOUR STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL
www.naag.org

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION
Consumer Response Center
Toll-free 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357)
www.ftc.gov

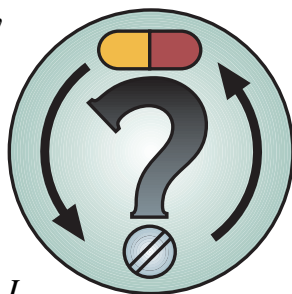
FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION
Toll-free 1-888-463-6332
www.fda.gov

AMERICAN SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING ASSOCIATION
Toll-free Consumer Hot Line 1-800-638-8255
www.asha.org

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DEAFNESS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATION DISORDERS**
Information Clearinghouse
Toll-free voice 1-800-241-1044
www.nidcd.nih.gov

SWITCHING PRESCRIPTIONS

“I’ve been taking a prescription drug that really helps control a chronic problem. The pharmacist just called to say that my doctor switched me to a different drug. He says the switch will save me money because it will cost my drug-benefit plan less. But I don’t know why I should switch. The new drug might not work as well. Am I giving up quality just to save the drug plan a few cents? Can I talk to my drug plan about refusing the switch?”



Many prescription drug companies have formed business relationships with pharmacy groups and insurance companies that handle drug-benefit plans. In some cases, pharmacies and insurers receive rebates or other financial incentives when they convince a plan member to switch to a different drug made by a “partner” manufacturer. If you are uncomfortable about making a switch, call the Food and Drug Administration, your local Department of Health, or your local Board of Pharmacy. They can help you decide whether it makes sense to change your medication.

Meantime, you may want to ask your pharmacist or physician a few important questions: Will the new drug work as well for your condition? Are there different side effects or risks? Are the dosage levels the same? Is there a business connection between the pharmacist and the drug manufacturer? Will the switch save you or your benefit plan money or cost you money?

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FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION
Toll-free 1-888-463-6332
www.fda.gov

NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING
Information Center
Toll-free voice 1-800-222-2225
Toll-free TTY 1-800-222-4225
www.nih.gov/nia

AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION
Toll-free Patient Information 1-800-237-2742
www.aphanet.org

U.S. PHARMACOPEIA
Toll-free 1-800-822-8772
www.usp.org

AARP
Toll-free 1-800-424-3410
www.aarp.org

NURSING FACILITIES



“My father is in a nursing facility. I’m really worried about him. He’s losing weight. He seems disoriented. I hope he is receiving decent care, but how can I find out? Who can I talk to? What can I do?”

Every nursing home should have a complaint procedure policy. If you have concerns or complaints, ask about the policy and follow the organization’s procedures. You also may want to ask the nurse in charge to review your family member’s care plan. If you still are uncomfortable with the situation, speak to the director of nursing, the social worker, or the administrator or check to see if the nursing home has a family council, a group of advocates who try to improve the quality of life in the home.

Often, nursing homes operated by large corporations have toll-free telephone numbers you can use to speak to a regional supervisor.

WHO CARES:

STATE OMBUDSMAN

STATE DEPARTMENT OF LICENSING AND CERTIFICATION

STATE OR LOCAL OFFICE ON AGING

STATE HEALTH OR WELFARE DEPARTMENT

YOUR STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL

www.naag.org

U.S. ADMINISTRATION ON AGING

Toll-free Eldercare Locator 1-800-677-1116

www.aa.dhhs.gov

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF HOMES AND SERVICES

FOR THE AGING

Toll-free 1-800-508-9442

www.aahsa.org

NATIONAL CITIZENS’ COALITION FOR

NURSING HOME REFORM

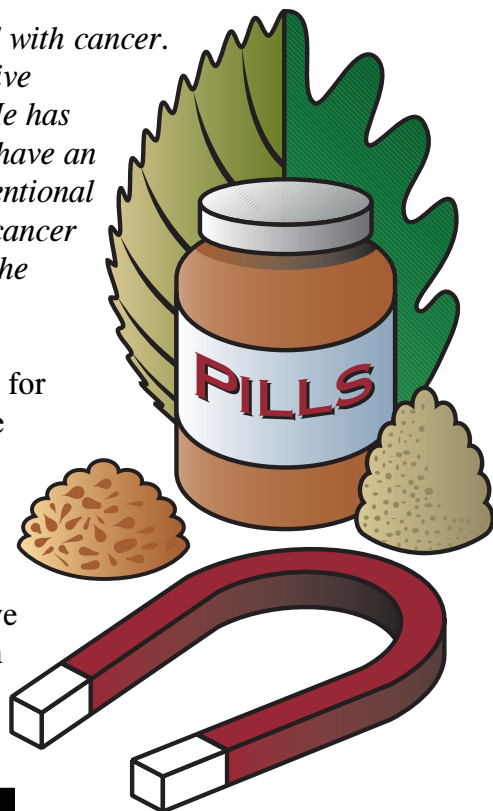
202-332-2275

www.nccnhr.org

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES

“My brother has been diagnosed with cancer. He wants to find out about alternative medicine as a possible treatment. He has seen ads for a clinic that claims to have an amazing success rate using unconventional approaches to cure many forms of cancer and other serious ailments. Should he believe them?”

Many unconventional treatments for cancer and other diseases are on the market. A few have undergone rigorous scientific testing for their curative value. Many that have been tested don't show effectiveness. Still, some forms of alternative therapy are recognized as helpful in caring for patients and helping them cope with some illnesses.



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YOUR STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL
www.naag.org

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION
Consumer Response Center
Toll-free 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357)
www.ftc.gov

FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION
Toll-free 1-888-463-6332
www.fda.gov

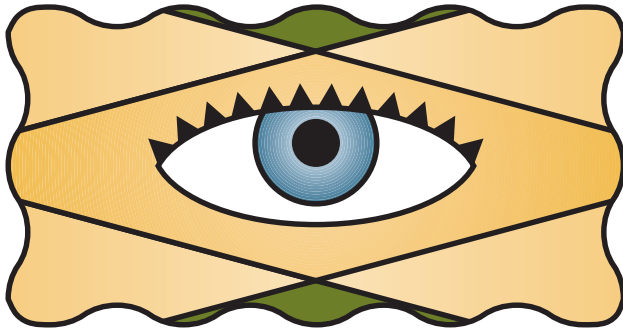
NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE
Cancer Information Service
Toll-free 1-800-422-6237
www.nci.nih.gov

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY
Toll-free 1-800-227-2345
www.cancer.org

Usually, a primary care physician is the best source of information about alternative medicine as a supplement to conventional treatments. If someone tries to sell you an alternative treatment by promising that it is effective, ask for a copy of the studies that prove it. Then ask your primary care physician or family doctor to review the studies to determine their credibility.

If you think you've been misled by advertisements for either alternative medicine or conventional treatments, be cautious and complain to the FTC.

CATARACT SURGERY



“My vision is getting worse. Things look pretty foggy. It’s hard for me to drive at night because headlights really bother me. Today’s newspaper had an ad about a large medical center that specializes in cataract surgery. The ad says the surgery is simple and has no risks. The center guarantees that patients will be able to see perfectly after surgery. I don’t know what to do.”

Cataracts are a normal part of aging; they usually develop over time and don’t have to be removed immediately. You generally can wait to have the surgery until your vision begins to bother you.

If your doctor tells you that you have a cataract, ask whether you need surgery right away, what your risks are based on your general health, and what type of surgery may be appropriate for you, should you choose it.

Be suspicious of any promotion promising completely successful, risk-free cataract surgery. Cataract surgery has a very high success rate, but no surgery is free from risk. Serious complications are rare, but when they do occur, they could result in loss of vision.

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YOUR STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL
www.naag.org

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION
Consumer Response Center
Toll-free 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357)
www.ftc.gov

NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE
301-496-5248
www.nei.nih.gov

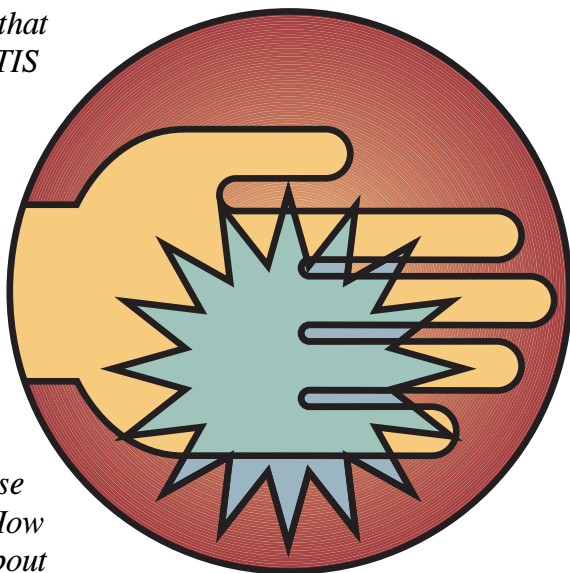
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF OPHTHALMOLOGY
National Eye Care Project Helpline
Toll-free 1-800-222-3937
www.eyenet.org

NATIONAL CENTER FOR VISION AND AGING
Toll-free 1-800-334-5497
www.lighthouse.org

PREVENT BLINDNESS AMERICA
Toll-free 1-800-331-2020
www.preventblindness.org

ARTHRITIS CURE

“I saw an ad in the paper that said, ‘CURE YOUR ARTHRITIS WITHOUT DRUGS WITH THIS ALL-NATURAL, GOVERNMENT-APPROVED REMEDY.’ The idea of a ‘natural’ remedy appeals to me and I’m impressed that the ad says the product is ‘approved’ by a government agency. But I think these so-called cures sometimes promise more than they can deliver. How can I get more information about products like this?”



The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ National Health Information Center can help you get in touch with public and private groups that have information about traditional and alternative therapies for arthritis and other conditions. Your public library also may have a

computer link to provide you with direct access to the National Health Information Center.

To check on whether a product is “government approved,” to learn more about an over-the-counter drug, prescription drug, cosmetic or medical device, or to report an adverse reaction to any of these products, call the Food and Drug Administration’s Consumer Affairs Information Line. For the latest information on vitamins and nutritional supplements, call the FDA’s Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

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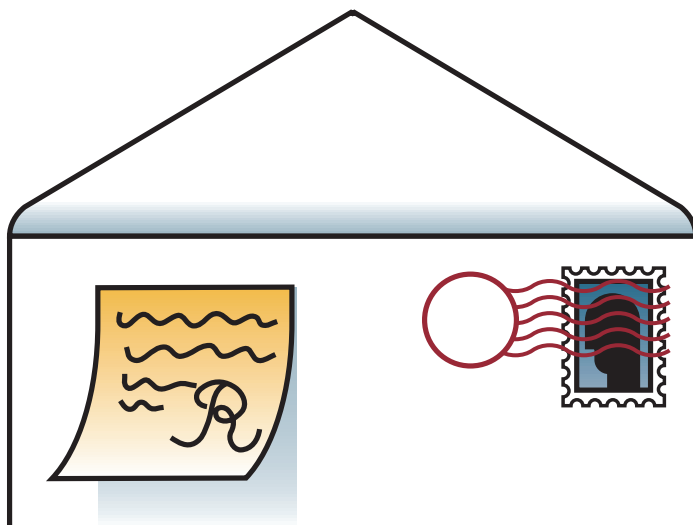
YOUR STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL
www.naag.org

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION
Consumer Response Center
Toll-free 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357)
www.ftc.gov

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
National Health Information Center
Toll-free 1-800-336-4797
www.dhhs.gov

FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION
Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
Toll-free 1-800-332-4010
www.fda.gov

DIRECT-MAIL SCHEMES



“Someone sent me a newspaper clipping with a product that’s supposed to reverse the effects of aging. On the article was a handwritten note that said, ‘Try this. It works! R.’ I don’t know who R is. Is this product on the level? What should I do?”

Some direct-mail marketers advertise their products through ads disguised as “clippings” sent by unnamed “friends.” The fact is that R doesn’t exist. The company got your name from a mailing list and sent the note from R to you and thousands of other consumers.

Other popular tricks are to design the envelope to look like a check or letter from a government agency, or to mimic the style of urgent overnight mail deliveries.

If a company uses a deceptive tactic on the outside of an envelope, be skeptical about what’s inside, too. Report any questionable solicitation you receive in the mail to your local Postmaster or Postal Inspector. Check the phone book for the number.

WHO CARES:

CHIEF POSTAL INSPECTOR
United States Postal Service
202-268-4298
www.usps.gov

YOUR STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL
www.naag.org

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION
Consumer Response Center
Toll-free 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357)
www.ftc.gov

NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING
Information Center
Toll-free voice 1-800-222-2225
Toll-free TTY 1-800-222-4225
www.nih.gov/nia

ABUSIVE CARE-GIVERS



“I have a home health aide who cooks for me because I live alone and I can’t cook for myself anymore. Her cooking is so bad that sometimes I can’t eat what she makes. She hits me. I’m afraid to tell anyone because the agency never does anything about it when my friends complain about their aides. I’m afraid no one will believe me. If I report her and she finds out, she’ll hurt me more. I don’t know what to do.”

WHO CARES:

YOUR LOCAL POLICE, SHERIFF’S OFFICE, OR STATE
ATTORNEY GENERAL

YOUR STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGING

U.S. ADMINISTRATION ON AGING

Eldercare Locator

Toll-free 1-800-677-1116

www.aoa.dhhs.gov

No one should be abused—physically or verbally—by anyone, including family members or care-givers. Everyone has the right to feel safe and secure in their own home. If you or someone you know is being abused in any way, report it. Everyone has the right to be protected.

*Think you've been misled or deceived by an advertisement for
a health care product or service or a medical procedure?
Contact your state Attorney General
or the Federal Trade Commission.*

YOUR STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL

Office of Consumer Protection

Your State Capital

Many Attorneys General have toll-free consumer hotlines.
Check with your local directory assistance.

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

Consumer Response Center

600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW

Washington, DC 20580

Toll-free 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357)

www.ftc.gov

Federal Trade Commission

www.ftc.gov

Toll-free 1-877-FTC-HELP

For the Consumer