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Generic *Drugs vs.* Brand-Name *Drugs*

Understanding the basics about your medications can help you make informed health care decisions.

For many people, the choice of a brand-name drug over a generic one has little to do with treatment or cost concerns, but rather is the result of several common misconceptions.

Myths about generic drugs

Because generic drugs can cost substantially less than brand-name options, there is often concern about their quality, effectiveness and safety.

However, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires that generic drugs be as safe and effective as their brand-name counterparts, having met rigorous standards with respect to identity, strength, quality, purity and potency.

Lower cost, same brand-name quality

Brand-name drugs often cost a great deal more than generic drugs because manufacturers of brand-name drugs have spent hundreds of millions of dollars in research and development, and they have a small window of time in which to recoup their investment. A patent protects their

brand-name drug and prevents other companies from marketing the same formula for a specified time.

Once the patent expires, other companies can apply to the FDA to manufacture and sell generic versions of the drug, and they can afford to charge substantially lower prices because they have no research and development costs to recoup.

Are there any differences?

Yes. While the FDA requires that generic drugs have exactly the same dosage, intended use, effects, side effects, routes of administration, risks, safety, and strength as the original drug, there are a few differences:

- Although they are often made by the same company, U.S. trademark laws prohibit generic drugs from looking exactly like brand-name drugs.

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Fast RX facts

- Eight in ten prescriptions filled in the U.S. are for generic drugs.
- On average, the cost of a generic drug is 80% to 85% lower than the brand-name product.
- Generic drugs save consumers an estimated \$8 to \$10 billion a year at retail pharmacies. Even more billions are saved when hospitals use generics.

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
www.fda.gov.

- While the FDA requires that generic drugs have the same active ingredients as their brand-name options, other elements such as color, taste and other inactive ingredients may vary from those in the brand-name versions. Some people may be sensitive to certain inactive ingredients. For example, some people may have reactions to certain dyes used in some drugs.
- Generic drugs vary by manufacturer, so you could receive a different version based on the pharmacy you visit and which supplier they use. This is only relevant if you have an allergy to a generic drug's inactive ingredient or for purposes of verifying an unfamiliar medication shape with your pharmacist.

Save money with generics

With every prescription you fill, you have the chance to save on the cost of your medications. Here are a few simple tips to remember:

- Unless allergies exist, always ask your doctor to prescribe generic prescriptions.
- Say “yes” when your pharmacist asks if you would prefer the generic equivalent of the brand-name drug prescribed by your doctor.
- If your prescribed drug has no generic equivalent, ask your doctor if there is a generic alternative appropriate for your condition.

Note: Please consult your insurance carrier's *Evidence of Coverage* booklet for further information on your covered prescription drug benefits, as well as any copayments that may be associated.

Medical advice disclaimer

The information provided is not intended as medical advice or as a substitute for professional medical care. Always seek the advice of your physician or other health provider for any questions you may have regarding your medical condition, and follow your health care provider's instructions.

