

What is the difference between a generic and a brand-name medication?

Not much, except for the name and price. The products contain the same active ingredients. Generics, however, may cost between 20 to 60 % less than the cost of the brand-name medication.

How can I get a generic medication?

Request a generic medication when talking with your doctor about your prescription(s). And you can always remind your pharmacist that you want a generic rather than the brand-name medication before they fill your prescription.

Why do generic and brand-name medications have different names?

Generic medications are called by their chemical name, while brand names are assigned by the manufacturer and generally have a trademark.

Are new brand-name medications better than older generics? Aren't generic medications inferior?

Many new medications come to the market annually; however, new does not always mean better. In many situations, generics remain the medications of choice. Also, generics have a longer safety record than newer medications. Finally, price does NOT reflect quality for generic or brand-name medications. Since generic medications generally sell for less than brand-name medications, they are falsely considered inferior to their brand-name counterparts.

Do all brand-name medications have generic equivalents?

No. Some medications are protected by patent and are manufactured by only one company. Generic versions are available only after the patent expires (in about 20 years), and often at a lower price. Current estimates suggest that about half the medications on the market are available in a generic form.

Does the FDA review and approve generics the same way they do brand-name medications?

Yes. Before the FDA will approve a generic for distribution, it must be generically and therapeutically equivalent to the brand-name counterpart.

That means it must:

- Have the same active ingredients, strength, and dosage form (tablet, liquid, injection, etc).
- Meet FDA specifications for quality, purity and potency for the approved indications and conditions of use.

Are brand-name medications made in more modern facilities than generic medications?

No. Both brand-name and generic medication facilities must meet the same good manufacturing processes standards required by the FDA. Both brand and generics manufacturing facilities are inspected and approved by the FDA. Generic firms have facilities comparable to those of brand-name firms. In fact, brand-name firms account for the production of an estimated 50 percent of generic medications. They frequently make copies of their own or other brand-name medications but sell them as a generic.

If brand-name medications and generic medications have the same active ingredients, why do they look different?

In the United States, trademark laws do not allow a generic medication to look exactly like the brand-name medication. However, a generic medication must duplicate the active ingredient. Colors, flavors and certain other inactive ingredients may be different.

Why are generic medications less expensive?

One of the main reasons generic medications are less expensive is because generic manufacturers don't have the initial investment costs of the original developer: including patent protection, research, development, marketing and promotion. Because generic manufacturers don't have the same development costs and they have little to no advertising costs, so they can sell their products at substantial discounts.

What if I have a question about how my medication is classified (as a brand or generic?)

If you have a question about whether a medication is classified correctly as a brand (or generic), please call the number on the back of your insurance card and we will thoroughly research your question. We will review information from the FDA, the pharmaceutical manufacturer, and your pharmacy if necessary. We will use that information to determine whether the medication is a brand or generic.

Are members notified when a product changes from brand to generic or generic to brand?

No. The pharmaceutical market is dynamic - products come and go, and sometimes come back on the market slightly modified (different packaging, different inactive ingredients). These changes can lead to a change in the classification of a product. Additionally since many medications are commonly discontinued or you get a different product from another pharmacy (same medication, but different manufacturer), we cannot predict which members are actively taking a product when a change in product classification occurs.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Most people believe that if something costs more it has to be better quality. In the case of generic drugs, this is not true. The standards for quality are the same for brand-name and generic products but generics provide the best value.

Note: Since many medication options are available, our physicians and pharmacists developed this to provide you with information about the available alternatives, as well as potential advantages and lack of advantages of the various products. This medication summary was developed based upon an evaluation of information from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), scientific studies, and input from practicing doctors and specialists.