

GENERICS: DISPELLING THE MYTHS

Many people are already taking generic drugs. Still, you might not realize that it is possible to benefit and save even more money by expanding your use of generic drug options. Studies show there are many misconceptions surrounding the use of generics. By dispelling the myths associated with generic drugs, you can take advantage of additional options for managing your medications.

Some of the common myths associated with generic drugs include:

- They are not the same prescription because they do not look the same as the brand name.
- They do not work the same as brand name.
- They are not tested.
- They are not as strong or effective as brand name.

Currently there are generic equivalents for about half of all brand name prescription medications and they are approximately 80 percent less expensive than the brand name.

In reality, a generic is a copy of a brand name medicine whose patent has expired, which usually occurs after the drug has been on the market between 10 to 14 years. The original brand name company then loses the exclusive right to manufacture that prescription formula. Because they have been on the market so long, the prescription is 'tried and true'. Generics are less expensive, not because they are made differently, but because the research has already been done and the drug has already been extensively tested by the original brand name manufacturer. All generic drugs are monitored and maintain the same exact *active* ingredients or chemical make-up as the original brand name medicine.

There are several things to keep in mind when thinking about switching to a generic drug:

- *Generic drugs often have long, complicated and unfamiliar names.* Brand name drug companies spend a lot of time and energy devising clever and memorable names for their products, increasing the likelihood that you will request it by name. Usually the generic name is a combination of elements from the chemical make-up. Avoid getting caught up on catchy names by making a habit of asking if there is a generic equivalent.
- *Generic drugs may look different from the brand name pill you are used to taking.* While generic medications are monitored the same as their brand name equivalents, trademark laws prohibit generic drug companies from duplicating exact look of the brand name medication. This requirement has absolutely no impact on the chemical formula or effectiveness of the generic option.
- *Sometimes your doctor will leave the decision to switch to generic up to your pharmacist.* Because your pharmacist works more closely with your insurance company, it is easier for him or her to see what tiers your medications are and whether your insurance offers a generic option at a lower or less expensive tier. **Because there is no difference between the brand name or generic, the decision to switch does not need to be made by your doctor.** To avoid any confusion at the pharmacy, always ask your doctor if there is a generic option available when he or she writes the prescription.

Key Resources:

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs Drug Report Archive:
<http://www.consumerreports.org/health/best-buy-drugs/drug-report-archives.htm>

Food and Drug Administration (Center for Drug Evaluation and Research):
<http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/ucm167906.htm>

Handouts:

- ▶ Generic Drugs: What You Need to Know
- ▶ From the FDA: Facts and Myths About Generic Drugs
- ▶ “Off-Label” Drug Use

When there is no generic available, you still have options for your prescriptions. Ask your doctor about other prescriptions within the same drug class. Prescriptions are grouped by classes, which are medications that treat the same symptoms or conditions, such as nsaid (pain relievers) or beta blockers (heart disease medications). Depending on your personal health and needs, it may sometimes be appropriate and effective to switch to a generic medication within the same drug class of your original brand name prescription. NOTE: This is not the same as prescriptions that are prescribed for off-label drug use.

Summary

Do not be fooled by brand name advertising; with generics you are still getting a tested and monitored drug with the same active ingredients. Despite misconceptions, generics are a widely available option for cutting your costs while still maintaining your health through regular use of your prescriptions.

Knowing the Difference Between Off-label Drug Use and Generics

Sometimes people get confused between the terms ‘off-label’ drug use and taking a generic prescription. There is an important distinction between the two and understanding the difference will help you make smarter prescription drug choices.

- ▶ An off-label prescription is when a doctor prescribes a drug for an unapproved use. Off-label refers to the fact that all drugs have labeling or detailed descriptions of their intended use based on the studies and testing submitted to the FDA by the drug’s original manufacturer.
- ▶ Off-label drugs can be either a brand name or generic. What the drug was originally designed and tested for is not the condition that your doctor prescribes it to treat.
- ▶ A generic medication is tested, monitored and prescribed to treat the same symptoms or conditions that called for the original brand name prescription.