

Frequently Asked Questions



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What is a generic drug?

A generic drug is a lower cost version of a brand-name medication. They are just as safe and effective as the brand name, but they are more affordable.

How are generic drugs different from brand-name drugs?

The biggest difference between a generic and brand name drug is the price. Most generics cost 70-90% less than the brand-name version. Generics drugs may also have a different shape, color or package. But these differences only affect how the medicine looks, not how it works.

How many people use generic drugs?

Millions of people use generic drugs every day. In fact, about 2 out of 3 prescriptions are for generic drugs. But there are still many people taking expensive brand-name drugs who could save a lot of money by switching to the generic version.

Are generics really the same as the brand-name?

Yes. Generic drugs have the same medicine as the brand-name, and the FDA will not approve them unless they are just as safe and effective as the brand-name drug. There are a few special medical conditions where a generic drug might have a small difference in how it works, but that is very rare.

Why are generic drugs so much cheaper than brand-name drugs?

Most drugs cost pennies to make. Brand-name drugs are more expensive because they don't have any competition to drive the price down. Also the companies that make brand-name drugs spend billions on advertising and must make a profit to succeed as a company and justify their spending.

If McDonald's were the only place that served hamburgers, it could charge very high prices, because anyone who wanted a hamburger would have to go there. Since Burger King, Wendy's, and many other similar places exist, the prices for hamburgers at all these stores are much lower. Each of them has to lower its prices to compete. Similarly, generic drugs compete with the brand-name drugs and drive the price down.

Why did my doctor prescribe a generic drug?

Doctors know that generic drugs are just as good as brand-name medicines and a lot more affordable. They know that many people have trouble keeping up with rising drug costs. They also know that generics have a longer safety record. So doctors prescribe generics because they want their patient to have a drug that is safe, effective, and affordable.

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If generic drugs are so good, why are brand-name drugs still prescribed?

There are several reasons. For newer medicines, brand-names are prescribed because a generic version is not available yet. Generic drugs can not be sold until the brand-name drug's patent ends, which may be 10 years or more.

Some people insist on using expensive brand-name drugs because they do not understand that generics are just as safe and effective. They think that “you get what you pay for” so a brand-name drugs must be “better” because they cost more. But that is not true – generics have the same medicine as the brand-name, and the reason generics cost less is because they only cost pennies to make.

Advertising is another reason why people continue to use brand-name drugs even when a more affordable generic would be just as good. Brand-name drug companies spend billions on advertising every year to convince patients and doctors that their drugs are “better” than more affordable generic drugs. But generic drugs are not advertised, which helps keep their prices low.

If toothpaste Brand A and toothpaste Brand B were exactly the same, but all you saw on TV were messages about Brand A, wouldn't you be more likely to buy Brand A? It is the same for medications. The important thing to know is that brand-name and generic drugs, like toothpaste Brands A and B, work in the same way.

Why should I take a generic drug if my doctor offers me free samples of brand name drugs?

Generic drugs are usually the most affordable option in the long run. Some doctors offer free samples to patients to let them try a new medicine. But usually a doctor can only give free samples for a

short period of time. Then you, the patient, need to pay for the rest. It is usually better to start on a generic drug, which are often available for as little as \$4 a month, than to start on a brand-name and later have to pay a much higher price.

Do generic drugs cause more side effects than brand-name drugs?

No. Brand-name drugs and a generic drug have the same rates of side effects. Each medication can affect each person in a different way. If your medicine has side effects that you are worried about, call your doctor.

Why should I take generic drugs?

Because they are safe, effective, and affordable. If your medications cost too much, it is likely because of brand-name drugs. Many patients skip important medications rather than pay these high prices, putting their health at risk. With generic drugs, you can get the same health benefits, but at a lower cost.

What can I do to make sure that I get a generic drug?

- When your doctor talks to you about your medications, tell your doctor that you prefer generic drugs if they are available.
- If no generic exists for your particular drug, ask your doctor if there is another drug that is available as a generic that treats the same condition. Often, many drugs do the same thing – such as lowering cholesterol or stopping heart burn – but some will have generics while others will not.
- Ask your pharmacist whether generic drugs are available for your medicines. The pharmacist can check with your doctor, if necessary.



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