



## Frequently Asked Questions About Generics

Prescription medications can be a costly part of your health care expenses, but using generics is one way to help control these costs. Generics may offer you a better value, while still being safe and clinically effective. The following are answers to some commonly asked questions about generic medications.

### What is a generic medication?

Every new prescription medication is given two names: a brand name and a generic name. The brand name is what the manufacturer chooses to call the product, and the generic name is the name of the chemical compound of the medication. All prescription medications have a generic name to describe their active ingredient.

### Are generic drugs effective?

To gain Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval, a generic must have the same effect on the body as its brand name counterpart. This means the generic product must have the same active ingredient and be the same strength as the branded product. A generic medication often has a different color or shape than the brand name version, but these differences do not affect how they work — they simply help to distinguish one product from the other.

### Why are most generic medications less expensive than brand name products?

A brand name medication usually has 20 years of patent protection, starting on the date its patent is submitted.<sup>1</sup> The patent protects the manufacturer's right to be the only maker of that product. After the patent expires, other companies can then make and sell the medication under either a different brand name or the generic name. Because of lower research costs and more competition, the generic product is usually sold at a lower price than the original brand name product. It should also be noted that many brand name manufacturers or their subsidiaries make generic medications.

### How are generic medications approved for use?

Before a generic is approved for use in the United States, the manufacturer must provide proof to the FDA that the generic version has the same active ingredient as the brand name product. In addition, the generic must meet FDA standards for the amount of active ingredient, as well as how much is absorbed into the body. When a generic meets these standards, it is considered comparable to the brand name product.<sup>1</sup>

### Are generic medications safe?

The FDA's role is to ensure all new brand and generic medications are safe and effective. Every generic is put through a rigorous, multi-step analysis that includes a review of scientific data on the generic's ingredients and performance.<sup>2</sup> All medications, regardless of whether they are brand or generic, may have side effects.

## Why do many pharmacy benefit plans promote generic medications?

Generic medications are safe, effective and often less expensive than brand name products, saving consumers from \$8 to \$10 billion a year at retail pharmacies.<sup>3</sup> In a comparison of average prescription costs, a generic is about \$17, while a brand name product is about \$72.<sup>4</sup>

Ask your doctor or a pharmacist about generic options every time you fill a prescription. When you have your prescription filled with a generic, you can be sure you are getting the medication you need at a better value.

### References:

1. Generic Drugs: Questions and Answers. Available at: [http://www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/generics\\_q&a.htm](http://www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/generics_q&a.htm). Accessed November 25, 2008.
2. You know that question that goes through your mind when you take your generic drug? Here's the answer. Available at: [http://www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/generic\\_info/generics\\_question\\_brochure.htm](http://www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/generic_info/generics_question_brochure.htm). Accessed November 25, 2008.
3. Office of Generic Drugs. What are Generic Drugs? Available at: <http://www.fda.gov/cder/ogd/#Introduction>. Accessed November 25, 2008.
4. The White House. President takes action to lower prescription drug prices. Available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/10011021-2.html>. Accessed November 25, 2008.

### To learn more about generic drugs

Contact the FDA at 1.888.INFO.FDA, or visit the FDA Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, Office of Generic Drugs website at: <http://www.fda.gov/cder/ogd/index.htm>

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