

What Every Consumer Should Know:



Generic vs. Brand Name Medications

What is a generic medicine?

All medicines have three names: brand, generic, and chemical. For example:

Brand = Bayer®

Generic = Aspirin

Chemical = Acetylsalicylic acid

They are all aspirin! Every drug has a generic name to describe its chemical makeup. Manufacturers assign brand names to their products.

Is there a difference between brand name and generic drugs?

In most instances there is little difference other than name and price. For a generic drug to be FDA-approved, it must have the same active ingredients, strength, and dosage form—pill, liquid, or injection—as the brand name equivalent. However, different fillers or additives may produce slightly different effects. *Please note:* not all drugs have generic equivalents.

Generic medicines might look different from brand name medications. However, the appearance does not alter the effectiveness of your medicine. Remember, never assume that a medicine that looks different is “generic.” Double check with the pharmacist before you leave the pharmacy. If you have questions about the way your medication looks, ask your pharmacist to explain.

How do I get a generic medicine?

Ask your doctor or pharmacist if a generic equivalent is available for the medication and the difference in price between the generic and brand name product.

What if I don't want generic medicine?

Share your concerns with your doctor. If you both agree that a generic medication is not the best choice for you, ask your doctor to write “brand-only” on your prescription. Depending on your health plan, you may have to pay the difference in price between the generic and brand name, or the entire cost of the brand name.

Sometimes my doctor writes a prescription for a brand name medication, but the prescription is filled with the generic—why?

Some states allow pharmacists to substitute less expensive generic drugs for many brand names (laws vary from state to state). However, if your doctor writes on the prescription form that a specific brand name is required, your pharmacist must fill the prescription as written. In these cases, a generic drug cannot be substituted. Your pharmacist can compare and evaluate generic and brand name drugs, and may be able to consult with your doctor to provide the right medication at the best possible price for you.

Where can I get more information about medication issues?

Visit the Food and Drug Administration web site (www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo). You can report problems you believe to be associated with prescription and over-the-counter medicines. The FDA site also offers information for consumers on drug interactions and how to be an active member of your health care team.