



## The Difference between Brand and Generic Medications

---

What's the difference between a brand-name and a generic medication? You know it has something to do with price. If you're like most people, however, that may be all you know—which leaves you wondering whether “going generic” means compromising quality for cost. In short, no, it doesn't. You may be surprised to learn that brand-name and generic medications are more alike than different. Here's a snapshot comparison.

A pharmaceutical company can spend millions of dollars researching, developing, marketing, and promoting a new drug, to which they assign a brand name. To protect their investment, the company pursues a patent. This gives them the exclusive right to distribute the medication for a period of time, typically 20 years.

Once the patent nears expiration, companies can apply to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to introduce a generic version, which is essentially a copy of the brand-name drug. This drug is called by its chemical name. In other words, its generic name simply describes its ingredients. About half the drugs on the market today are available in generic form.

Generic drugs can be sold at a discounted price, not because they are inferior in quality but because they haven't incurred the same development costs as their brand-name equivalents. Competition among manufacturers of generics can then drive down prices even further. Some analyses show that drugs costs can be cut by 14 to 16 percent per day when generics are used instead of brands.

Generic drugs are not second-rate: They must meet the same standards as brand-name medications. Manufactured at the same quality facilities, they must undergo a rigorous review that confirms their safety and effectiveness before receiving FDA approval. Although it's become standard practice, most states require that generics have the same active ingredients, strength, dosage, and route of administration—whether pill, liquid, or injection—as their brand-name counterparts. Their quality, purity, and stability must be comparable, too, leading to similar effects—and side effects—as the brand-name drug. And, contrary to popular opinion, generics do not take longer to take effect in your body.

So how do generic medications differ from brand-name drugs, other than in price? Trademark law does require some differences. In general, inactive ingredients that affect color and flavorings are different. However, this does not impact the safety and effectiveness of the generic drug. When picking up a prescription, though, don't just assume it's a generic if it looks different than it did in the past. Double-check its identity with your pharmacist.

It is important to know that your pharmacist must fill prescriptions as written by the doctor, even if they are for expensive brand-name medications. However, that doesn't mean you and I can't talk to the doctor about potentially making a change in the future. Sometimes there is an acceptable generic that your doctor is simply not aware of.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me @ 873-3244 or [mcglynnrx@tds.net](mailto:mcglynnrx@tds.net)

Thanks,

Dan McGlynn

