



# The difference is in the name

## **Generic vs. Brand: What's the Difference?**

Generic drugs contain the same ingredients as brand drugs, but are not manufactured under a brand name or trademark. The color and shape of the generic drug may be different from its brand-name counterpart, but the active ingredients are the same. A generic drug must contain the same active ingredients and must be equivalent in strength to the original brand-name product. While generics and brand names contain the same active ingredients, the inactive ingredients are different. Inactive ingredients keep a tablet from crumbling, add bulk to a tablet to make it large enough to handle, and may provide a pleasant taste or color.

## ***Are Generic Drugs Safe and Do They Work as Well as Brand-Name Medicines?***

The FDA tests new generic drugs to ensure their safety and effectiveness. All generic drugs must have the same quality, strength, purity and stability as their brand-name counterparts. The FDA makes sure that generics are made according to federal standards, have the same risk-benefit profile as the brand name and are released into the body at the same rate in the same way as the brand-name medicines.

## ***Does a Generic Drug Look Different Than Its Brand-Name Equivalent?***

It may be a different size, color and shape from the brand-name version.

## ***Why Do Generic Drugs Cost Less?***

Generic drugs tend to cost less than brand-name drugs because the companies that make them don't bear the cost of research and development, or the cost of introducing the drug to consumers.

## ***Are All Drugs Available as a Generic?***

No. Generics can be made only after the patent on a brand-name drug has expired. However, more than half of all brand-name drugs have generic equivalents available. Your doctor or pharmacist can tell you if your prescription has a generic and if it's the right choice for you.

## ***How Do I Get a Generic Drug?***

Ask your doctor if there is a generic option and if it is right for you. Most pharmacists will be able to dispense the generic drug with your doctor's permission.

# Knowing more about prescription drugs

## Prescription Drug Ads: What You Should Know

*More than ever, drug makers pitch their products directly to consumers instead of relying on doctors to spread the word. These companies have more than tripled their spending for direct-to-consumer (DTC) ads in recent years.*

Thirty percent of Americans say they have talked with a doctor about a specific medicine after seeing an ad. And one in eight Americans has received a specific prescription in response to seeing a drug ad.<sup>1</sup>

Those who oppose DTC advertising argue that the ads induce demand for prescription drugs — especially newer, higher priced drugs — which in some cases may be wrong for a patient’s treatment.

On the other hand, those who support DTC advertising say the ads educate the public about health conditions and available treatment options. They argue that because the drugs in question require a doctor’s prescription, the ads themselves do not lead to inappropriate use. They claim conditions featured in ads become less embarrassing or “taboo,” which helps people speak more openly with their doctors. They also say the ads help remind patients to keep taking the drugs their doctors prescribe.

There are many things to consider when you hear or see an ad for a specific drug:

- Drug companies spend twice as much on DTC advertising as on research and development, according to a study by the consumer health organization Families USA.
- Prescription drug ads rarely mention lifestyle changes or other non-drug interventions, which are often as important as drug therapy in improving outcomes.
- Ads don’t provide complete information. TV ads have time limits, and print ads have limited space. As a result, ads can give you some details about a drug, but not the whole picture.

## Why Your Doctor May Not Prescribe the Medication You Saw on TV

You may need medication, but not always the one in the ad you see or hear. There are several good reasons why the drug in the ad may not be right for you.

- *It may be brand new on the market.* Patients sometimes hear about new drugs before their doctors do, even before final clinical-trial results are published in a medical journal.
- *It may be one choice of many.* The drug might be just one in a class of many drugs. A “drug class” is a group of medications that work similarly, but have different chemical ingredients. A different drug in the same class might work better for you. With some conditions, drugs are prescribed in a certain order based on the severity of the condition.
- *It may be the wrong medication.* Imagine seeing an ad for an antidepressant and deciding that your symptoms suggest you are depressed. After a physical exam, your doctor concludes that your thyroid levels are low. The antidepressant would not have helped your condition.
- *It could be a dangerous drug for you.* Taking your personal medical history into consideration may make the treatment not right for you. TV ads don’t point out every possible side effect and drug interaction. Vital information in magazine and newspaper ads is usually in tiny print and easily missed.
- *It may cause side effects.* Drugs are chemicals. They can produce unwanted side effects that are different for every person. Your doctor may choose your medication based on its potential for causing side effects.



<sup>1</sup> The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, “Understanding the Effects of Direct-to-Consumer Prescription Drug Advertising” (A report on the results of a Web-based survey designed and analyzed by Kaiser Family Foundation staff and conducted among a nationally representative random sample of adults between August 17 and September 7, 2001)