

Generic Medicines

(Brand choice – price options)

Generic medicines are alternative, often less expensive brands of medicines. They contain the same active ingredient as the originally marketed brand, and can be expected to be just as safe and effective. You can save money by asking your doctor or pharmacist for generic brands of your medicines.

The company that first develops and markets a medicine gives it two names – the chemical name of the active ingredient (generic name) and a brand name. This company (the originator company) also takes out a patent for sole rights to produce and market its original brand of the medicine for a number of years. Once this patent expires, other companies may produce and market the medicine using different brand names. The alternative brands for off-patent medicines are commonly called generic brands or generics. Generics contain the same active ingredient(s) as the original brand, so they are expected to work in the same way in the body, to produce the same benefits and the same potential side effects.

Quality and safety

In Australia, companies that produce generics have the same tight manufacturing controls and must adhere to the same quality and safety standards as companies making the original brands of medicines.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is responsible for assessing and registering all medicines in Australia. Before any prescription medicine or brand can be put on the market in Australia or listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), a team of experts ensures it is safe and effective, of good quality and correctly labelled and packaged. For a generic brand to be included on the PBS, it must be proven to be bioequivalent and interchangeable

with the original brand. This means that the generic brand can be expected to have the same therapeutic effects as the original brand.

Some 'originator companies' market generic brands of their own original products. In some cases, exactly the same product made on the same production line will be marketed under two different brand names and at two different prices.

Ingredients

Both generic brands and original brands contain the active ingredient(s) and some inactive ingredients. The inactive ingredients include colourings, flavourings, preservatives, fillers and special tablet coatings. Different brands of a medicine may look or taste different because they contain different inactive ingredients. Different brands of a medicine may also be packaged differently. Different types of packaging include bottles, blister packs, foil packs and calender packs. These differences do not change the active ingredient and how it works in the body.

Advantages of different brands

As with other products, the different brands of a medicine may be different prices, and the competition that results from having more brands on the market means lower prices overall.

As with other products, you can choose which brand of medicine you buy and use. Your choice may depend on things such as:

- The type of packaging – for easy opening or storage
- The shape, size or taste for easy swallowing or for giving to children
- The need to avoid a certain inactive ingredient (e.g., lactose, gluten)
- The company that makes it (e.g., whether the product is Australian made)
- Price.

You can ask your pharmacist about the differences between brands, including their prices, before you make a decision about brands.

Self care

- If you change brands, carefully check the name(s) of the active ingredient(s). Make sure you know which product the new brand will replace.
- To save money, show your Medicare and concession cards every time you have a prescription filled.
- Ask your pharmacist about the PBS Safety Net and use a prescription record form (PFR form) to keep track of your medicine costs, so you will know when you qualify for the PBS Safety Net.

Important

- In Australia, lower priced prescription medicines are not lower quality medicines.
- In most cases you can choose which brand of medicine you use. It is OK to tell your doctor or pharmacist which brand you want.
- The PBS subsidy does not cover price differences between brands. If you choose or are prescribed a more expensive brand, you must pay the difference between your brand and the lowest priced brand. This amount does not count towards the Safety Net.
- The 'Consumer Medicine Information' (CMI) leaflet provides

important information about the medicine you are taking. For example, how to take your medicine correctly, possible side effects and all the ingredients in the product. It is important to read the leaflet carefully when starting a new medicine or using a different brand. Ask your pharmacist for the CMI for your medicine.

- If you know you are allergic to a particular inactive ingredient, for example lactose or gluten, check with the pharmacist before using a new medicine or different brand of medicine.

Note: Sometimes different brands of a medicine are not interchangeable. Ask a doctor or pharmacist for advice.

For more information

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)

Infoline – phone 1800 020 613
Website www.health.gov.au/pbs

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222
Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service

Website: www.nps.org.au

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)
Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26
from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine.*

Related fact cards

- » *Help with Medicine Costs*
- » *The PBS and You (website only – ask your pharmacist)*
- » *Wise Use of Medicines (website only – ask your pharmacist)*

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