

ARE GENERIC MEDICATIONS AS GOOD AS BRAND-NAME MEDICATIONS?

This is a very common question that pharmacists get all the time, and I completely understand why there is concern. After all, each of us want “the best” when it comes to our health and medications are no exception.

The simple, take home answer is yes, generic medications are as good as brand name medications. For those of you who like simple, to the point answers, you can stop reading now!

For the rest of you, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has a very nice website that answers this and similar questions about generic medications. Here are excerpts from their website:

What are generic drugs?

A generic drug is identical — or bioequivalent — to a brand name drug in dosage form, safety, strength, route of administration, quality, performance characteristics and intended use. Although generic drugs are chemically identical to their branded counterparts, they are typically sold at substantial discounts from the branded price. According to the Congressional Budget Office, generic drugs save consumers an estimated \$8 to \$10 billion a year at retail pharmacies. Even more billions are saved when hospitals use generics.

Are generic drugs as effective as brand-name drugs?

Yes. A generic drug is the same as a brand-name drug in dosage, safety, strength, quality, the way it works, the way it is taken and the way it should be used.

FDA requires generic drugs have the same high quality, strength, purity and stability as brand-name drugs.

Not every brand-name drug has a generic drug. When new drugs are first made they have drug patents. Most drug patents are protected for 20 years. The patent, which protects the company that made the drug first, doesn't allow anyone else to make and sell the drug. When the patent expires, other drug companies can start selling a generic version of the drug. But, first, they must test the drug and the FDA must approve it.

Creating a drug costs lots of money. Since generic drug makers do not develop a drug from scratch, the costs to bring the drug to market are less; therefore, generic drugs are



usually less expensive than brand-name drugs. But, generic drug makers must show that their product performs in the same way as the brand-name drug.

What standards do generic drugs have to meet?

Health professionals and consumers can be assured that FDA approved generic drugs have met the same rigid standards as the innovator drug. To gain FDA approval, a generic drug must:

- contain the same active ingredients as the innovator drug (inactive ingredients may vary)
- be identical in strength, dosage form, and route of administration
- have the same use indications
- be bioequivalent
- meet the same batch requirements for identity, strength, purity, and quality
- be manufactured under the same strict standards of FDA's good manufacturing practice regulations required for innovator products

As you can see, in order for a medication to be considered a generic to a brand name drug, it must undergo a number of tests to prove it is identical to the brand name medication. As a pharmacist, I fully support the use of generic medications because

- 1) they have been proven to be the same as the brand name medication and
- 2) they usually are significantly less expensive. And who doesn't want to save money!

So, my advice to you is simple; use generic medications whenever you have the opportunity. If the medication you take does not have a generic, ask your doctor if there is another medication option that has a generic. Don't be afraid to ask your doctor!

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FDA website for "Generic Drugs: Questions and Answers": <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/resourcesforyou/consumers/questionsanswers/ucm100100.htm>