



Pharmaceutical
Society of Australia



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 exclusive rights to produce and market its original brand of the medicine for a fixed time period. 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 and work in the same way in the body.

Quality and safety

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

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is responsible for assessing and registering all prescription 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), an expert team ensures it is safe and effective, of good quality and correctly labelled and packaged.

Some 'originator companies' market alternative 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

Generic and originator products contain the active ingredient(s) and some inactive ingredients. The inactive ingredients of medicines include colourings, flavourings, preservatives 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 and foil 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 have 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 like:

- 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.

Important

- In Australia, lower price prescription medicines does *not* mean 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.

Self care

- If you change brands, make sure you know which product the new brand will replace. Check the name of the active ingredient (generic name) on the label carefully, to make sure you do not take the same medicine twice as different brands (double dose) or replace the wrong medicine.
- 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 to keep track of your medicine costs, so you will know when you qualify for the PBS Safety Net.

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)

For more information

HEALTHInsite – website www.healthinsite.gov.au

National Prescribing Service – website www.nps.org.au

PBS Infoline – phone 1800 020 613 or website www.health.gov.au/pbs

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126.

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

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Your **Self Care** Pharmacist