

Generic Drugs: Are They Really as Good?

Generic drugs are less expensive than brand name drugs, and are as safe and effective, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in a science forum “Personalizing Your Healthcare: The Best Consumer is an Educated Consumer” presented in Washington, D.C. in April. “Things that cost more are usually thought to be better,” said Gary Buehler, Director of the FDA’s Office of Generic Drugs. “This is absolutely not true for generic drugs. Generic drugs are a good deal.”

Generic drugs are less expensive because generic manufacturers don’t have the investment costs of the developer of a new drug. New drugs are developed under patent protection. The patent gives the company the sole right to sell the drug while the patent is in effect. When patents on brand name drugs are near expiration, manufacturers can apply to the FDA to sell generic versions. Because manufacturers of generics do not have the same development costs, they can sell generics at substantial discounts. All generic drugs must be reviewed and approved by the FDA.

- Generic drugs have the same chemistry, manufacturing, controls, labeling and testing as brand name equivalents.
- All drugs must be safe and effective. Since generics use the same active ingredients and are shown to work the same way in the body, they have the same risks and benefits as brand-name counterparts.
- The FDA requires that generic drugs have the same quality, strength, purity and stability as brand name drugs.
- U.S. trademark laws do not allow a generic drug to look exactly like the brand name drug. Generics may look different, but the generic must duplicate the active ingredients in the brand name drug.

Using generic drugs is a way to save money on prescription medications. The cost of the generic drug is significantly less, often half the cost of a brand name drug. You pay a low flat copayment through either APWU Health Plan’s mail order service or retail pharmacy prescription drug program, resulting in out-of-pocket savings. You receive the same medical benefits with generics at a lower cost.

Many physicians and patients don’t communicate about drug costs, but if you initiate a discussion with your doctor about the possibility of prescribing a generic alternative, your savings can be considerable. You save money and are not sacrificing quality, so ask your doctor if a generic drug would be appropriate for you.