



Generic drug FAQs

Q: What are generic drugs?

A: Generic drugs are identical, or "bioequivalent" to brand-name drugs - in dosage, safety, strength, route of administration, quality, performance characteristics and intended use. Although generic drugs are chemically the same as their branded counterparts, they are typically sold at substantial discounts from the branded price.

Q: What are the differences between generic and brand-name drugs?

A: There are very few distinctions, other than name and price. Generic drugs are often called by their chemical names.

Q: If brand-name drugs and generic drugs have the same active ingredients, why do they look different?

A: In the United States, trademark laws don't allow generic drugs to look exactly like brand-name drugs. But they must duplicate the active ingredients.

Q: Are generic drugs as safe as brand-name drugs?

A: Yes. The FDA requires that all drugs 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 benefits and risks as their brand-name counterparts.

Q: Are generic drugs as strong as brand-name drugs?

A: Yes. The FDA requires generic drugs to have the same strength, quality, purity and stability as brand-name drugs.

Q: Why are generic drugs less expensive?

A: Generics cost less because generic manufacturers don't have the high marketing and upfront investment costs that developers of new drugs have. Also, competition between drug manufacturers helps keep the prices lower.

Q: Does every brand-name drug have a generic equivalent?

A: No. Only about half of the brand-name drugs on the market today have a generic alternative. Some drugs are protected by patents and are supplied by only one company.