



# Drug FAQs for Members

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## GENERIC MEDICINES: SAFE, EFFECTIVE, AFFORDABLE

### What is a generic medicine?

- Generic medicines are the same as their brand-name counterparts in regards to their dosage, safety, strength, quality, the way they work in the body, the way they are taken, and the way they should be used.

### Who approves generic medicines?

- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) tests and approves all medicines sold in the United States (US) to make sure they work well and are safe.
- The FDA requires that generic medicines be similar in quality, strength, purity, stability, and the way they get absorbed in the body as their brand-name counterparts.
- Kaiser Permanente also thoroughly reviews information about all of our generic medicines to assure that the generic medicines you receive are of high quality.

### How are generic medicines and brand-name medicines similar?

- They have the same active ingredients, they work the same way in the body and in the same amount of time. Generic medicines have the same effects, side-effects, and risks and benefits as their brand-name counterparts.

### How are generic medicines and brand-name medicines different?

- Generic medicines do not look exactly like their brand-name counterparts due to US trademark laws. The name, color, flavor or other parts of the medicine may be different, but none of these things affect the way the generic medicine works.
- Generic medicines are usually made by more than one drug company. The brand drug company may also make a generic version of their own brand-name drug. The FDA estimates that 50% of generic drugs are manufactured by brand drug companies. This means that the brand and generic drugs are exactly the same (i.e. brand name drug “X” and the generic drug “X” are made by the SAME drug company).
- The marketing and advertising of these medicines are different. In 2005, brand-name manufacturers spent over \$4.5 billion on direct-to-consumer advertising for brand-name medicines. These marketing costs get passed on to you, the consumer, in the form of higher medication costs. Generic medicines are generally not advertised to either doctors or to the public.

### Is a generic medicine available for every brand-name medicine?

- **No.** When brand medicines are first marketed, they have patents that prohibit others from making them.
- Most brand medicines are protected by drug patents for 17 years. The patent protects the company from anyone else making or selling the same medicine until the patent runs out.
- When the patent expires, other drug companies can start selling the generic version of the medicine. But, first, they must test the drug and the FDA must approve it.
- If the brand-name medicine you take does not have a generic counterpart, ask your doctor or pharmacist if there is a different medicine that is similarly safe and effective that is available as a generic.

### Why are generic medicines less expensive?

- Generics are less expensive than brand name medicines because they do not have the same development and marketing costs associated with them and because there can be multiple generic manufacturers making the same generic drug and that competition tends to bring the cost of generic drugs down.

Reference: 1. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Facts About Generic Drugs – English – 1/3/05