

Health Bulletin

Choosing Between Generic And Brand Name Drugs

(NAPSA)—Understanding more about generic and brand name drugs could be good for your wallet and your health.

First, what's the difference, anyway? Branded medicines result from years of research and major financial investments by pharmaceutical and biotech companies. These medicines are protected by patents. Generic drugs are copies of branded medicines, allowed after patents expire. Before a patent expires, no generic may be available.

Generics can be a smart option for many people, and the drugs may save them and the health care system money. However, some brand and generic medicines may have subtle differences, such as differences in the formulation or the amount of drug that enters the body.

Formulation Differences May Be Important

According to a recent survey sponsored by PriCara, a division of Ortho-McNeil-Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc., among the 47 percent of pharmacists who recommended a brand name medication over its generic equivalent, 54 percent cited a formulation issue that could be important to a specific patient.

For instance:

- Branded medicines may have different formulations—such as being long-acting—that generic versions do not offer.
- For some critical dose drugs (such as some thyroid replacement drugs, anticoagulants, and anticonvulsants), a small change in the amount of drug that gets into the body—which can occur with generic drugs—can have significant health consequences.

"It's very important that consumers talk to their pharmacists about health issues—particularly their medications," explains Dr. Harold Silverman, consultant to



It's important to understand your options with generic and brand name drugs.

PriCara, pharmacist and author of "The Pill Book." "Doing so can clear up a number of misconceptions that could affect your health."

Try these tips for talking to your pharmacist:

1. Ask for the name of the medicine you are prescribed and what it does.
2. Know how much medicine you should take, how often you should take it and for how long.
3. If a generic version of your medication is offered, ask if it might be different from the brand medicine and if it's right for you.
4. Know what results you should expect.
5. Ask about side effects and, if the medicine does not work, how long you should wait until talking to your doctor about it.
6. Ask whether there is concern about taking the medicine with other medicines you are taking, even over-the-counter medicines or herbal and dietary supplements.

Learning More

You can find more information on medications at the Merck Manual online library at www.merck.com, in the Orange Book section of the FDA's Web site at www.fda.gov/cder/ob/, and in "The Pill Book."