



Drug FAQs for Members

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

GENERIC MEDICINES: SAFE, EFFECTIVE, AFFORDABLE, FDA & KP APPROVED.

What is a generic medicine?

A generic medicine is a copy of a brand name medicine in terms of its dosage, safety, strength and quality. It has the same active ingredients and works the same way in the body. Generic medicines have the same benefits, side-effects, and risks as their brand name counterparts. Some generic medicines are even made by the same drug company that makes the brand name product.

How are generic medicines different from the brand name version?

Generic medicines do not look exactly like their brand name counterparts due to U.S. trademark laws. The name, color, or flavor of the medicine may be different, but none of these things affect the way the generic medicine works.

One of the biggest differences between generic and brand name medicines is cost. In 2008, drug companies spent over \$4.3 billion on advertising brand name products. These costs get passed on to you, the consumer, in the form of higher medicine prices. Generic medicines are often made by more than one drug company, which results in competition. And because generic products are usually not advertised to either doctors or to the public, there are fewer extra costs to pass along to the consumer.

How do I know that generic medicines are safe and effective?

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) tests and approves all medicines sold in the United States to make sure they work well and are safe for consumers. This includes medicines manufactured in the U.S. and foreign countries. FDA requires that generic medicines perform the same way as the brand name drug.

In addition to FDA's review, Kaiser Permanente does an independent quality review of generic products before they are approved for use in our Program.

Is a generic version available for every brand name medicine?

No. When brand name medicines are first introduced, they are made by only one company and are protected by drug patents for 17 years. Once the patent expires, other drug companies can then copy the recipe. Before they can start selling the generic version of the medicine, they must first test the medicine to prove that it's the same as the brand name product. These tests must be reviewed and approved by the FDA.

If the brand name medicine you take does not currently have a generic counterpart, you can ask your doctor or pharmacist if there's a different medicine that's as safe and effective and available as a generic.

What are the advantages of generic medicines?

Using generic medicines is just one way that Kaiser Permanente is able to continue providing you high quality health care at an affordable price. Generic medicines provide the same quality of care as brand name medicines at a much lower cost. For members with tiered drug benefit coverage, this means lower generic co-pay and for members without drug benefit coverage, this means lower out-of-pocket expense.

What about recent concerns regarding generic medicines for conditions like epilepsy (seizures)?

Like all generic medicines, medicines used to treat seizures are reviewed and approved by the FDA to make sure they meet the same standards as their brand name counterparts. In addition, generic medicines used to treat seizures are evaluated and approved by Kaiser Permanente neurologists before they are approved for use by our members.

Where can I find more information about generic medicines?

Please speak with your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions about generic medicines.

For more information from the FDA on generic medicines, please go to <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers> and click on the “**Generic Drugs**” link under the “**Popular Topics**” section.

Reference:

1. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Facts About Generic Drugs – English – 07/30/2009