

FACTS ABOUT GENERIC MEDICINES

What are generic medicines?

It is a medicine that is the same as the brand name medicine in:

- Dosage
- Safety
- Strength
- Quality
- The way it works
- The way it is taken
- The way it should be used



Are they as safe to use as the brand name medicines?

Yes, the MCC (South African Medicines Control Council) requires generic medicines to be a "bioequivalent", meaning being exactly the same as the brand name medicines.

Are they as strong as the brand-name medicines?

Yes. The MCC applies standards laid down by the Medicines and Related Substances Act, (Act 101 of 1965) which governs the manufacture, distribution, sale, and marketing of medicines.

Do generic medicines take longer to work in the body?

No. They work in the same way and in the same amount of time as the brand name medicines.

Why are generic medicines less expensive?

Generic medicines (equivalents) are substantially less expensive than brand name medicines, mainly due to savings in research and development costs. Manufacturers incur fewer costs in making generic medicines because they do not bear the burden of proving clinical efficacy and safety through clinical trials, already conducted by the brand name medicines company. The cost of manufacturing the medicines generally constitutes a fraction of the original cost, saving members and medical schemes substantial amounts of money.



Once a patent on an original medicine expires, multiple companies may produce equivalents, increasing competition among manufacturers, which drives prices down even further. The brand name medicine is however generally still sold at a higher price due to brand loyalty and a distrust of generic alternatives.

If brand name medicines have the same active ingredients, why do they look different?

If you are a member of the World Trade Organisation (South Africa is a member), then patents are granted for 20 years dated from the time of filing. The brand name medicine is protected by patency laws, which is the reason why it will look different in terms of colour, taste or packaging etc.

Does every brand name medicine have a generic drug?

No. When new medicines are first produced they have drug patents. Most drug patents are protected for a set number of years. The patent protects the company that produced the medicine first. It prevents another company from producing and selling the medicine until the patent has expired. When the patent expires, other drug manufacturers can start selling the generic version of the medicine. However, it needs to meet the approval of the MCC.

Why would I want to use generic medicines instead of brand name medicines?

The associated savings are quite substantial and are passed along to you in the form of lower prices and ultimately stretching your medical aid medicine benefits. Who does not want their savings to last longer?

How can you avoid generic reference price co-payments?

- Ask your pharmacist to give you a generic medicine which is below the reference price.
- Encourage your doctor to prescribe generic medicine.

