

## How Safe Are My Generic Drugs?

You have probably taken a generic drug. This is because most prescriptions are filled with generics. Generic drugs work just like brand-name drugs. The big difference is generics can save you money. But you may wonder if generic drugs are safe.

### *How do generic drugs differ from brand-name drugs?*

Generic drugs are almost like copies of brand-name drugs. A generic drug has the same active drug (in the same strength) as its brand-name version. The generic drug company has to show that the drug will work like the brand-name drug and that the ingredients used are safe. But there are some differences between generics and brand-name drugs. A generic drug may look or taste different than the brand-name version. A generic drug will usually cost less than the brand-name drug.

### *How safe are generic drugs?*

There are rules generic drug companies have to follow to make sure their drugs are safe. The generic drugs have to pass the same quality checks as brand-name drugs. Any problems with a generic drug or brand-name drug will be investigated by the FDA (for U.S. drugs) or Health Canada (for Canadian drugs) to make sure it is safe.

### *I'm hearing that some generic drugs are contaminated. Should I be concerned?*

Small amounts of chemicals (e.g., NDMA) have been found in some generic and brand-name drugs used to control heartburn or to lower blood pressure. Keep things in perspective. Everyone is exposed to NDMA. Small amounts of NDMA are in drinking water, cigarette smoke, and some foods or drinks. Examples of foods and drinks that may have NDMA are grilled meats, bacon, pepperoni, cheese, beer, and whiskey. The bacteria in your stomach make a little bit of NDMA. NDMA can also be made during some chemical reactions. But, don't worry. It takes a lot of NDMA to be harmful. For example, if 8,000 people take the highest dose of a blood pressure drug contaminated with NDMA every day for four years, there might be one more case of cancer.

### *When should you call your pharmacist?*

- Ask your pharmacist if you have any questions about your generic drugs. For example, check with your pharmacist if:
  - your pills look different than before. This can happen if the pharmacist fills your prescription with a generic drug made by a different company. But, check to be sure.
  - your medicine is not working like it used to. Your pharmacist can look into why this might be happening.
  - you are having a problem that you think is from your medicine. You may be sensitive to something that is in the generic drug, but not in the brand-name drug (e.g., different colorings, sugars). Your pharmacist can help figure this out.
- Don't stop taking your meds without first talking with your prescriber or pharmacist.
  - If you need to stop a med, your pharmacist can work with your prescriber to find a good alternative.

### *What is the bottom line?*

- Generic drugs are effective. Generic drugs are safe. Generics drugs provide the same health benefits as brand-name drugs, but cost a lot less money!

*[This handout may not cover all possible information. It does not replace the need for professional medical care. Always follow the instructions from your healthcare provider.] [November 2019; 351101]*

## Take the “Burn” out of Heartburn

Heartburn occurs when acid from your stomach backs up into your throat. You may feel pain or burning in the stomach, chest, or throat. Heartburn often happens at night or after a big meal.

### ***What can I do to Prevent Heartburn?***

Sometimes there are easy things you can do to decrease heartburn.

- If you are overweight, lose weight.
- Avoid tight fitting clothes.
- Avoid foods that give you heartburn.
- Eat small meals.
- Don't lie down for at least 30 minutes after eating.
- Raise the head of the bed (six inches).
- If you smoke, try to stop.

If lifestyle changes don't help, you may also need to take a medicine to prevent or treat your heartburn. Different kinds of heartburn medicines are available. The most common are **antacids**. They neutralize stomach acid (makes it less acidic). **H2-blockers** or **proton pump inhibitors** (PPIs) reduce the amount of acid your stomach makes.

### ***How fast do Heartburn Medicines Start Working?***

Antacids work fastest, within a few minutes. H2-blockers usually work within an hour. Proton pump inhibitors may take up to 24 hours to kick in.

### ***How do I know which Antacid is right for me?***

There are a lot of antacids, but they are not all the same. Depending on their ingredients they can have different side effects.

- Antacids with aluminum (e.g., *Gelusil*) or calcium (*Tums*, *Roloids*) might cause constipation.
- Antacids with magnesium (e.g., *Maalox*, *Mylanta* [U.S.]) might cause diarrhea.
  - Check with your prescriber before taking these if you have kidney problems.
- Effervescent antacids (e.g., *Alka-Seltzer*) may have salt in them and can raise blood pressure. They can also contain aspirin, which may cause bleeding in your stomach.

### ***Which Heartburn Medicine Should I Take?***

The choice of heartburn med is often based on how quickly you need relief and how often you have heartburn. Your pharmacist can help you pick the heartburn med that's best for you.

- For quick relief, try an antacid first. These don't cost a lot and work well if you only have heartburn once in a while. They're short acting, so not the best choice for frequent heartburn.
- For longer acting relief, try an H2-blocker (e.g., *Zantac*, *Pepcid AC*). These won't work as fast as an antacid, but may last up to 12 hours.
- Or for quick relief that lasts longer than an antacid alone, try a combo product (antacid + H2-blocker), like *Duo Fusion* [U.S.] or *Pepcid Complete*.
- Save PPIs (e.g., *Olex* [Canada], *Prevacid 24HR* [U.S.], *Prilosec OTC* [U.S.]) for severe or frequent heartburn. They are more expensive, don't work as fast, and last up to 24 hours.

### ***Call Your Prescriber if you:***

- Have trouble swallowing or pain when you swallow.
- See blood in your stool or vomit.
- Feel dizzy, light-headed, or short of breath.
- Have heartburn more than three times a week for more than two weeks.

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