

## 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]*