

# Changing from Branded to Generic Medicines



## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is a generic medicine?

A generic medicine is the same as its branded medicine equivalent and contains the same active ingredient.

For example, the branded medicine, **Lipitor**, contains the active ingredient, **atorvastatin**.

**Atorvastatin** is the generic name for **Lipitor**. As a generic equivalent, **atorvastatin** has exactly the same medicinal substance in it as **Lipitor** and it acts in the same way

### What is a branded medicine?

The brand name is given to a medicine by the pharmaceutical company which developed it. If more than one company make the medication there may be several brand names.

For example, **Lipitor** is the brand name for a well-known medicine used to reduce cholesterol. It contains the active ingredient, **atorvastatin**. If more than one company makes the medicine there may be several brand names.

It takes many years to develop a new medicine and may cost up to 1 billion pounds, so a pharmaceutical company is given patent protection for its branded product for several years, in order to be able to recover research and development costs. After patent expiry, other companies may start making generic versions of the same medicine, which are less expensive for the NHS.

### Why is generic prescribing being promoted?

Generic prescribing by your doctor is a more cost-effective use of limited NHS funds. The cost of a generic medicine is generally LESS than its branded equivalent. Sometimes the difference is significant - up to 95% less. Across Surrey Heartlands, generic prescribing could save an estimated £500,000 a year that could be spent in other areas of the NHS.

Use of a medicine's generic name is also good prescribing practice. Your dispensed medicine will then also be labelled by its generic name. The name on the pharmacy label will be a reminder to you of the name of the active ingredient you are taking.

## **Are there any differences between a branded medicine and an equivalent generic medicine?**

There are no differences in the way the medicine works or in its safety and efficacy. The main differences are *appearance, cost and packaging*.

If you have any concerns or doubts, please ask your GP and/or your pharmacist for advice.

Generic medicines must meet the same detailed safety, quality and efficacy requirements as the original branded product. You WILL NOT be prescribed a generic medicine that is not of the same quality as its branded equivalent.

## **Is a change to a generic medicine alternative always possible?**

There are some circumstances where it is important to continue to take the branded medicine you have been prescribed. Your GP or pharmacist can advise you. They know about your medicines and whether you can, or cannot, change to a generic medicine equivalent.

## **What if I still want to be prescribed a branded medicine?**

Your GP or any healthcare professional who prescribes for you is required to prescribe medicines that meet your health needs. As such, if the medicine you require is available in generic form and there is no clinical requirement for a specific brand, you will be provided with a prescription for the generic medicine.

If you wish to access a branded version of the drug you are advised to seek a consultation with a private specialist or private GP service who may issue a private prescription for you. You will be required to pay the full cost of the medicine and it is advisable to check with the pharmacy the cost before having the prescription dispensed. Please carefully consider whether the total cost will be worthwhile for you personally.

### **Remember, generic medicines:**

- have the **same active ingredient** as the branded medicine
- meet the **same standards** as the branded medicine
- are as **safe and effective** as the branded medicine

