

BRANDED DRUGS OVER GENERICS

A treatment at risk of being overused, as indicated by the Italian Society of Clinical Pharmacy and Therapy

There continues to be unwarranted distrust by both doctors and patients of generic drugs. The choice not to use generic drugs can be highly inappropriate because, in the vast majority of cases, they can easily be substituted for the corresponding branded drugs. Generic drugs are in fact identical to the reference medicine (branded drugs). The only difference is that they are sold directly with the name of the active substance followed by the name of the manufacturer (for example, Paracetamol Angelini instead of Tylenol). They also cost less. If the doctor has prescribed a branded drug, you can ask the pharmacist if there is a generic drug at a lower cost.

LET'S UNDERSTAND WHY

Generic drugs are equal in every way to their corresponding branded drugs. Above all, they are characterized by the same quality and effectiveness, and cost decisively less (at least 20% less by law, but sometimes as much as 70% less). This lower cost is due to the fact that, when the branded drug reaches its patent expiration (after at least 20 years), other companies can market the active substance of this medication, which has already widely tested, without having to bear the research expenses of the parent company. The generic drug is subject to the

same process of production, distribution and conservation as the branded drug. As with all medication, regulation continues even after the drug has been put on the market. The regulatory authorities are the same. Choosing a generic drug makes it possible to save both on a Class C drug, that is paid by the patient, and on a Class A drug, which is fully reimbursed by the national health service. In the latter situation, if the generic drug is available and the patient chooses a branded drug, the patient must pay the difference in



price. In 2016, citizens paid over a billion euros for the price difference between the "brand-name drug" and the generic drug. We can be sure that they were not all necessary.

THE TRANSPARENCY LIST

The Italian Medicines Agency (AIFA), the authority responsible for medication regulation in Italy, organizes medications with expired patents and their corresponding generic drugs into special lists. These are termed "transparency lists". All pharmacists have one in their pharmacies and it is available for consultation. The transparency list is updated monthly, is searchable by the commercial name or the medication's active substance, and provides the dosage and package with the lowest price possible (the reference price). If there is a corresponding generic drug that costs less than the one requested by the patient, the pharmacist must always advise of this alternative.

To learn more, consult our special "Farmaci" (in Italian) on:

www.altroconsumo.it/salute/farmaci

Project "Doing more does not mean doing better - Choosing Wisely Italy"

www.slowmedicine.it
www.choosingwiselyitaly.org

GENERIC DRUGS: ADVICE FROM ALTROCONSUMO



- Always ask the pharmacist if a generic drug at a lower cost is available. Substitution is almost always possible, unless the doctor has explicitly written in the prescription that the medication cannot be replaced (in such a case, the doctor should explain why).
- On our website, you can find a database that contains more than 14 thousand medications and lets you check whether there is a generic equivalent. <http://www.altroconsumo.it/salute/farmaci/calcola-risparmia/banca-dati-farmaci>.
- As with any medication, you should discuss any side-effects with your doctor or pharmacist. If necessary, you can report it to the AIFA. Citizens can report adverse reactions by submitting a form available on the AIFA website. <http://vigifarmaco.it>.
- Regions can automatically decide whether or not to introduce the prescription fee (named "ticket"). For updated information regarding co-payments and exemptions currently in effect, consult our service "Diritti in salute" (in Italian) www.altroconsumo.it/salute/diritti-in-salute.