For more information

To get the facts about prescription drugs and the value of generics, visit the FDAs Center for Drug Evaluation and Research online at www.fda.gov/cder.

You can also visit Medco’s website, www.medco.com. Go to “Drug information,” then click “Medication resource center,” followed by “Generic medication resource center.”

From brand to generic to you:

A pill’s path
Knowing more about your medications might save you money.

Tried and true. Reliable.

That’s how many people feel about a brand-name drug they take. But might there be another version of that drug that works exactly the same way and costs much less?

Take a look beneath the pill’s coating, then decide for yourself.
What, if anything, separates a generic drug from its brand-name version?

Nothing at all when it comes to your treatment. But the cost savings can add up to a lot. Let’s follow a drug’s path from the laboratory to you:

**Development**
Scientists create a combination of chemicals that they believe will successfully treat or cure a medical condition.

**Testing**
To make sure the new drug is safe and has the desired effect, researchers put it through a strict series of tests: first on animals, and then—if the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves—on people.

**Patent**
Usually during testing, the manufacturer files a patent on the drug, creating a new brand name and preventing others from making this drug.

This protection typically lasts for about 20 years, but by the time the new drug finally reaches the marketplace, as few as 10 years may remain.

**Generic equivalent**
Another manufacturer can release a generic equivalent once the patent expires. It must be bioequivalent to the brand-name product; that is, its active ingredients must have the same molecular structure and be shown to perform the same way in your body.

Because of this strict requirement, the generic isn’t subject to a repeat round of tests.

If you’re taking a brand-name drug, talk to your doctor. A less expensive generic might be right for you.

**Evaluation**
FDA physicians, pharmacologists, and scientists review the test data. If the results hold up, the brand-name drug can be approved for prescription use.

The FDA continues to monitor the drug’s usage and safety even after approval.

The FDA reviews the generic equivalent to ensure that it meets the same requirements as its brand-name counterpart.

The generic must have:
- The same active ingredients (although “filler” ingredients, like color, may be different)
- The same dosage form
- The same quality, strength, and purity

Generic drugs cost less to develop, manufacture, and market than brand-name drugs, so they’re likely to be less expensive for you and your health plan.

That means if a generic equivalent is available, you can possibly save money while receiving the same benefit to your health.