

There are many original brand and generic brand medications on the market for epilepsy and your pharmacist may offer you a different brand of medication when you are getting your prescription filled. While there should be no meaningful difference in preparation and effectiveness, there are some concerns for people with epilepsy who are thinking of switching antiepileptic medication brands to consider. This guide explains the differences and whether it's safe to switch.

What are generic medications?

A generic product is essentially the same as the original brand. Even though specific guidelines and tests are conducted to ensure the generic medications are the same, a slight degree of variation is allowed. This means that the generic product is not exactly the same as the original brand.

Generics also have a different name, different packaging, and can look different and they are often slightly cheaper.

Generic medications are comparable in dose, strength, route of administration, intended use, quality and performance. However, they are still not identical to the original (unless developed by the original company). There are a few key differences:

- The most obvious differences are the tablets appearance and packaging.
- They are often cheaper, which does not mean that they are inferior. It is because manufacturers of the generics do not have to recover the expenses of developing the original medication.
- The formulation itself may not be exactly the same either. The non-active ingredients may differ - these include what is used as a filler, binder, coating or colouring.
- There are also minor differences in the active ingredient. These are very small because the generic preparation must be similar enough to the original to satisfy strict guidelines. The maximum variability between a generic and original medication is 10%.

It is a problem if I switch brands?

Most antiepileptic medications have a narrow 'therapeutic range'. This means even a minor change in blood levels of the active ingredient can lead to a significant change in response, seizures - or possibly unwanted side effects for the few people taking doses that already border on toxicity. The risks of switching - whether the medication change is from brand to generic, generic to brand or generic to generic - include changes in seizure pattern, having breakthrough seizures after a long period without seizures, or experiencing new and more unwanted side-effects.

Studies have shown that even small differences in antiepileptic medication can trigger seizures in people who have epilepsy. Not only can it mean more seizures but they can be more severe.

With most types of medications, switching brands may not make any difference. **But with medications for seizures, they can make a difference.**

With antiepileptic medications there is a fine line between the medication not working, working well or causing toxic symptoms. The slightest change in dose can make all the difference, and switching brands may change the level of the medication in the blood.

*Therapeutic range: The concentration of a drug at which the person will experience the desired clinical effect.



What should I do?

1. **Don't switch medication if your epilepsy is well-controlled.**
2. **Ask the pharmacist** offering a generic medication about why they advise switching. Be aware it is your choice if you want to switch or not, and feel free to insist on receiving your usual preparation.
3. **Know the active ingredient name** of your medication. It may help to note it down to carry in your wallet for reference. You could even take the box to the chemist to help you remember.
4. **Ask your doctor to tick the 'do not substitute' box** on the prescription form so you cannot be offered a different medication by a pharmacist.
5. **Remember the consequences** of switching antiepileptic medications can possibly increase the risk of seizures or breakthrough seizures.
6. **Always talk to your neurologist** before switching epilepsy medications and do not make this decision at the chemist or based on the pharmacist's advice.
7. **Check the packet.** Check the packaging and brand name against what you usually use before you leave the chemist. If it doesn't match, ask the pharmacist to change it.
8. **Consider the real cost.** If your pharmacist suggests that switching to another brand or 'generic' can save you money, consider if the small money saving is worth the cost of perhaps more seizures or adverse side effects. Feel free to politely refuse and insist on your usual medication.

If the brand works, don't switch!