

SWITCHING MEDICATION BRANDS

FACT SHEET



SWITCHING MEDICATION BRANDS

Many medications with the same active ingredient are available under several different brands. Changing brands is not recommended.

There are many original brand and generic brand medications for epilepsy.

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, and the active ingredient is still the same, there are some concerns for people with epilepsy.



What are generic medications?

A generic medication is a medication that contains the same active ingredient as an original brand-name medication.

Apart from a different name, generic brands come in different packaging, the pills can look different, and they are sometimes slightly cheaper.

Even though specific guidelines and tests are done to ensure the generic brand 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.

There are a few key differences:

- The most obvious are the tablets appearance and packaging.
- The *inactive* ingredients may differ – these include what is used as a filler, binder, coating, flavouring 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%.
- They are sometimes 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.



IS IT A PROBLEM IF I SWITCH BRANDS?

Most anti-seizure medications have a narrow ‘therapeutic range’*. This means even a minor change in blood levels of the active ingredient can lead to a change in response, for instance, seizures – or possibly unwanted side effects for the few people taking doses that already border on toxicity.

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

The risks of switching – whether the medication change is from original brand to generic brand , generic brand to original brand or generic to a different generic – include changes in seizure pattern, having “breakthrough” seizures after a long period without seizures, or experiencing new or more unwanted side-effects.

Studies have shown that even small differences in epilepsy medication can trigger seizures in people who have epilepsy.

With most types of medication, switching brands may not make any difference. But with epilepsy medications, there is often a fine line between the medication not working, working well or causing unwanted side-effects.

The slightest change can make all the difference and switching brands may change the blood levels.

What should I do?



- Don't switch medication if your epilepsy is well-controlled.
- Ask the pharmacist offering a generic brand 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Remember the consequences of switching anti-seizure medications can possibly increase the risk of seizures or breakthrough seizures.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 side effects.
- Keep good records. Record all the names of your medications on a list can help you, your doctor and your pharmacist keep track of your medications and brands. This can also be helpful if you unexpectedly get admitted to hospital as well.



If the brand works, don't switch!

Disclaimer: This information is given to provide accurate, general information about epilepsy. Medical information and knowledge changes rapidly and you should consult your doctor for more detailed information. This is not medical advice, and you should not make any medication or treatment changes without consulting your doctor.