

Controlling Pain Part 3:

Generic versus Brand Name Medicines

The following information is based on the general experiences of many prostate cancer patients.

Your experience may be different. If you have any questions about what prostate cancer treatment services are covered by the IMPACT Program, please call your nurse case manager at

1-800-409-8252.

Table of Contents

What Should I Know About Brand Name And Generic Drugs?.....	3
How Are Drugs Named?.....	3
Is There A Difference Between Generic And Brand-Name Drugs?	4
Key Words	6

What Should I Know About Brand Name And Generic Drugs?



How Are Drugs Named?

Drugs may have as many as three different names: brand, generic, and chemical. Drug companies give their products brand names, like Tylenol or Advil. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves the **generic** (ja-ner-ik) name. Generic names are shortened names by which drugs are usually known. Chemical names are long and can be hard to say. Here's an example:

Brand name: Tylenol

Generic name: Acetaminophen (a-set-a-mee-noe-fen)

Chemical name: N-(4-hydroxyphenyl) acetamide

Many pain relievers are available under both generic and brand names. Your doctor, nurse case manager, or pharmacist can tell you the generic name.

Examples of Generic Drugs



Is There A Difference Between Generic And Brand-Name Drugs?

Yes, there are differences between generic and brand name drugs.

1. Generic products usually cost less than brand-name drugs.
2. Sometimes medicines can have the same generic name, but are made by different companies. Even if they have the same generic name, the companies may make the medicines differently. This may affect how your body uses the medicine. For this reason, your doctor may want you take a brand-name drug. You might want to ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist if you can use a less expensive medication. Pharmacists are careful to obtain high quality generic medicines, so it is sometimes possible to make substitutions.
3. In addition to the main substance (aspirin, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen), some generic medicines contain substances called **additives**. Common additives are:
 - a. **Buffers** like magnesium carbonate or aluminum hydroxide, which are added to lower the chance of you having an upset stomach.
 - b. Caffeine which acts as a **stimulant** and can help lower the amount of pain you feel.
 - c. **Antihistamines** (an-tie-his-ta-min) like diphenhydramine, pyrilamine that help you relax or sleep.

Medicines with additives can cause some unwanted effects. For example, antihistamines sometimes cause drowsiness. Feeling tired is fine if you are going to sleep, but it could be a problem during the day or while you are driving. Additives tend to increase the cost of nonprescription pain relievers. And, they can also change how the generic drug works with other medicines you may be taking. If you find that a medicine with certain additives is a better pain reliever, ask your doctor, nurse case manager, or pharmacist if the additives are safe for you.

Remember to talk to your doctor or nurse case manager about any concerns you may have about generic and brand name drugs.

Key Words

Additives: a variety of substances, which may be added to generic medicines, which can affect how the medicine works.

Antihistamine: any of various compounds used for treating allergic reactions (as hay fever) and cold symptoms.

Buffers: a substance added to a generic medicine to reduce stomach upset.

Generic: Official nonbrand names by which medicines are known. Generic names usually refer to the chemical name of the medicine.

Stimulant: a substance added to a generic medicine, which may cause you to be unable to sleep.