

Treatment

Generic medications

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There is a range of disease-modifying therapies approved for people living with multiple sclerosis in Australia. These therapies, also called immunotherapies, work to reduce disease activity in the central nervous system and reduce the frequency and severity of relapses in people living with multiple sclerosis. The multiple sclerosis therapy landscape is continuously evolving and it is likely that generic disease-modifying therapies will become available to treat multiple sclerosis.

What is a generic medicine?

A generic medicine is defined by Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) as "an additional brand of an existing medicine. It contains the same active ingredient (the chemical that makes the medicine work) as the existing medicine."

Apart from containing the same active ingredient, generic brands also have to be 'bioequivalent'. That is, if you take the same dose of a generic medicine

as an existing medicine, the same amount of active ingredient is absorbed by your body over the same period of time.

In other words, a generic medicine works in the same way and provides the same clinical benefit as its brand-name version. You can take a generic medicine as an equal substitute for its brand-name counterpart.

When does a generic medicine become available?

A generic medication can become available when a brand-name medication's patent protections have expired. The original brand product has a finite patent life, at the end of which other manufacturers can apply for a licence to manufacture and market a generic version.

Is a generic medicine as safe as possible?

Generic prescription medicines must meet the same standards of quality, safety and effectiveness as the original brand. As with all medicines, the TGA continually monitors safety once they are on the market.

Is there a difference in cost?

For multiple sclerosis medications, if the medicinal product (medicine) is listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), the cost to someone living with multiple sclerosis for the generic brand medicine, is likely to be the same as the original brand name version.

Do I have to accept a generic medicine if it is offered?

No, the choice is yours whether you are happy to go with the generic or if you'd prefer to stick with the original. Ask your neurologist or MS Nurse if you have any questions or concerns about switching between brands of medicine.

There may be times when your neurologist or MS Nurse recommends you stick with one particular brand. For example, some pharmaceutical companies

offer a patient support program or services (e.g. blood tests) that may not be available if you choose the generic brand.

Also, the medicine itself and its packaging may look different, so it is important that you avoid confusion and make an informed choice about taking different brands.

For more information on multiple sclerosis and other multiple sclerosis treatments

- The TGA provide a helpful Fact Sheet regarding generic medicines, please visit:
<https://www.tga.gov.au/sites/default/files/information-generic-prescription-medicines.pdf>
- Speak to your neurologist about what treatment best suits your individual circumstances.
- MS nurses can also provide information, training and ongoing support in managing your immunotherapy.
- We can provide emotional and practical support for every stage of your journey. For more information visit www.msplus.org.au
- For more information about multiple sclerosis treatments, research, clinical trials and for your state MS organisation visit www.msaustralia.org.au

References

1. Australian Government, Department of Health, Therapeutic Goods Administration Fact Sheet <https://www.tga.gov.au/community-qa/generic-prescription-medicines-fact-sheet>

Note

MS Plus does not recommend any specific disease-modifying treatment for people living with multiple sclerosis. Decisions about any treatments, taking into consideration the potential benefits and side effects for each individual's circumstances, should be made in careful consultation with the person's neurologist.

The information supplied in this document is collated from material provided by the relevant pharmaceutical company and MS Australia.