

Brand and Generic Medication Explained

What's the difference between generic and brand medications?

WHAT IS THE THYROID GLAND?

The thyroid gland is a butterfly-shaped endocrine gland that is normally located in the lower front of the neck. The thyroid's job is to make thyroid hormones, which are secreted into the blood and then carried to every tissue in the body. Thyroid hormone helps the body use energy, stay warm and keep the brain, heart, muscles, and other organs working as they should.

WHAT IS THE GENERIC NAME OF A MEDICATION?

The generic name is the name of the active ingredient in the medicine. For thyroid hormone, the generic of T4 is levothyroxine and the generic of T3 is liothyronine.

WHAT IS THE BRAND NAME OF A MEDICATION?

The brand name is the name assigned by the registered drug company. It has the same active ingredient but different inactive ingredients. There may be multiple companies selling the same medication under different brand names. All forms of the medicine contain the same active ingredient, however, what is added to the medicine to form the pill (inactive ingredients) can be different between generics and brands. Popular brand names for levothyroxine (T4) include but are not limited to Synthroid®, Levoxyl®, Unithroid®, Tirosint® in the United States and Euthyrox® and Eltroxin® in Europe.

Please visit the following link for a table of approved Levothyroxine Sodium Oral Formulations approved in the United States.

- [Table of Approved Levothyroxine Sodium Oral Formulations \(Tablet or Capsule\)](#)

WHERE DO I FIND THE BRAND NAME AND GENERIC NAME OF THE MEDICINE?

The brand and generic names can be found next to each other on the drug label. The brand name should have the ® (registered) symbol next to its name.

DO THE COSTS OF GENERIC AND BRAND MEDICATIONS DIFFER?

Generally, generic medications are less expensive compared to brand medications.

ARE EITHER GENERIC OR BRAND MEDICATIONS PREFERRED?

Generally, generic medications are less expensive than brand medications and are favored by most insurance companies. Insurance companies often require a trial of generic medicine before a brand medication is approved.

The FDA has strict rules regarding the quality, strength, and purity of the active ingredient in both generic and brand medicines. Both brand and generic medication should work equally well to replace the thyroid hormone that your body needs. There are several studies that have shown similar effectiveness (how well the medication works) between brand and generic medications.

- [Comparative Effectiveness of Generic vs Brand-Name Levothyroxine in Achieving Normal Thyrotropin Levels](#)
- [Levothyroxine Sodium Product Information](#)
- [Association Between Generic-to-Generic Levothyroxine Switching and Thyrotropin Levels Among US Adults](#)



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WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD YOU ASK YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT BRAND VERSUS GENERIC?

The availability of multiple new brands for the same generic medication makes it challenging to choose the right one. When being prescribed either a brand or generic medication, ask your doctor about their experience with that medication. Questions to ask also include how well the medication works, how well patients do on the medication, and any safety issues.

Generic and brand name medications may work differently in your body as the absorption can be different with different inactive ingredients. If your thyroid medication looks different (color or shape) and your dose has not changed, follow up with your pharmacist and/or thyroid specialist as your generic may have changed and it may be important to re-check your thyroid hormone levels to make sure results are still within desired range on the new preparation

CAN YOU NAME SOME SITUATIONS WHERE YOUR DOCTOR MAY RECOMMEND BRAND OVER GENERIC DRUG?

If your provider is concerned that you are not responding as you should to a generic medicine or your response is not consistent, they may suggest you use a brand name drug. This may happen more often in certain situations such as in pregnancy, in very young babies, thyroid cancer, celiac disease or other malabsorption such as after gastric bypass. If you are allergic to the inactive ingredient in one generic or brand drug, you can be switched to another form with a different inactive ingredient. Repeating the thyroid labs 6-8 weeks after switching the medication is advised to ensure the effectiveness of the new drug.

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