



## MONEY-SAVING TIPS FOR BUYING PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS AND OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICINES

*“My wife and I spend a lot on medications and we need to find ways to cut costs...”*

— Max C., 82 year-old retired lawyer

Many older adults have health problems that require taking medications on a regular basis. To afford prescription and over-the-counter medications, patients may need to sacrifice other purchases. However, the savings tips listed below may help reduce the medication costs.

### Cost Savings Tips

- ✓ Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about the least expensive options.
- ✓ Ask your doctor to prescribe the least expensive drug that will work for you.
- ✓ Ask your doctor or pharmacist about substituting a generic drug. Generics have the same ingredients as brand name drugs but are much less expensive.
- ✓ If a generic drug will work, ask your doctor to indicate on the prescription that substitution is permitted. This will help when you are at the pharmacy.
- ✓ Check with your pharmacist to insure that a generic brand is being used (unless the doctor has indicated a substitution should not be made).
- ✓ Call the drug manufacturer about Patient Assistance Programs or discount cards. Some are even willing to supply free medications to low-income individuals. Although these programs have restrictions, they may be worthwhile to look into. Your doctor or pharmacist can give you the drug company’s name and number.
- ✓ Shop around. The price of medications can vary greatly among pharmacies. By shopping around, you can compare prices to get the best value for your money.

- ✓ Mail Order Discount Pharmacies have discounted prices on over-the-counter medications, diabetic supplies, and prescription drugs. Some do not charge membership fees, but may charge for shipping and handling. For a list of discount mail order pharmacies, go to [www.medicarerights.org](http://www.medicarerights.org) or ask your doctor or pharmacist if he or she knows of any programs. Only buy from mail order or an Internet pharmacy accredited by the Verified Pharmacy Practice Sites (VIPPS). (Look for the VIPPS hyperlink seal displayed on the Internet Web site.)
- ✓ Fit your prescription to your budget.
- ✓ For all new prescriptions, ask the doctor to prescribe just enough to make sure the medication works correctly before you pay for a larger amount. This helps prevent waste in case your prescription changes.
- ✓ If you have a chronic condition, have been on the medication for a few weeks, and will need to take the medication for a long or extended period of time, ordering bulk quantities at a discounted rate may be more affordable. Usually, buying in bulk greatly reduces dosage cost.
- ✓ Consider tablet splitting. Tablets come in varying strengths. Usually higher-strength tablets are almost the same price as lower-strength pills. By buying higher-strength tablets and splitting them in half, you can get two doses for close to the price of one. Ask your doctor if tablet splitting would work for any medications you are taking and if it would lead to significant cost savings. Using a tablet-splitting tool (available at most pharmacies) will help you split the tablet correctly. Be careful: Make sure your doctor has approved tablet splitting for your medication. Make sure you split the correct tablet. Make sure the drug is split exactly in half.
- ✓ Consider over-the-counter (OTC) alternatives. Many OTC medications cost up to 75% less than prescription drugs but can be just as effective. These include antihistamines, pain relievers, and antacids. Also, using the “store brand” OTC alternative (i.e., CVS acetaminophen) to a “brand” OTC drug (i.e., Tylenol) can also save money. Ask your doctor if an OTC alternative can work for you.

- ✓ Consider prescription alternatives. If you have prescription drug insurance, a prescription medication may end up costing less than OTC products. As a cost saving measure, if you have prescription insurance, ask your doctor if it is possible to prescribe a drug for you that you usually buy over-the-counter.
- ✓ Compare brand names by asking your doctor if the drug you take is less expensive under a different brand name.
- ✓ At each doctor's visit, ask if you need to continue all your medications. Stopping a drug you don't need can save you money, but stopping a drug you do need does nothing but hinder your road to good health.
- ✓ Only take what you need. It is easy to succumb to messages in drug company advertisements. The drug companies want you to buy their products. Be a good consumer and only take the medications you need for the specified time period as determined and prescribed by your doctor.

*This resource provides brief, general information about this health care topic. It does not take the place of specific instructions you receive from your health care providers. For answers to other questions consult your physician or other health care provider.*

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