



Drug FAQs for Members

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

When Prescription Medicines Become OTC

All drug products sold within the U.S. are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to assure they are safe and effective for the conditions they are intended to treat.

- Some medicines are approved for prescription (Rx) use and can be taken only under the direction of a physician or other health care provider.
- Other medicines are approved for over-the-counter (OTC) sale for consumers' self-supervised use and do not require an Rx.
- Some medicines start off as Rx only and get switched to OTC status later. These switches are part of a growing trend to increase consumers' choices for safe and effective medicines used to treat common medical complaints, like hay fever/allergies, heartburn, and constipation. Rx-to-OTC switches are expected to continue as the self-care movement grows and consumers take a more active role in managing their own health and health care costs.

Why do medicines get changed from Rx-to-OTC status?

- After being on the market as an Rx product for a long time and used by many people, some medicines are shown to be safe enough for OTC use. The FDA reviews and approves all medicines that are switched from Rx-to-OTC status.
- OTC status offers consumers a convenient, cost-effective way to access medicines without the need for a doctor's office visit or phone call to get a new prescription or refill.

Is the OTC product the same as the original Rx product?

- Most times the OTC product is the same as the Rx product, having the same active ingredient(s), strength, and instructions for use. The manufacturer often discontinues the Rx version once a product switches to OTC status (e.g., Rx Claritin and OTC Claritin).
- Some medicines are available OTC in lower strengths but require an Rx for higher strengths, e.g., ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) is available OTC in the 200 mg strength, but is Rx in the 400, 600, and 800 mg strengths.
- Be sure to read the label on any OTC product and follow the directions carefully, even if you have taken the Rx version before. If you have questions about any medicine that has switched from Rx to OTC status, please talk to your pharmacist or other health care provider.

Examples of Rx-to-OTC Products

| Medication | Used to treat |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Loratadine (Claritin [®]) | Allergy and hives |
| Omeprazole (Prilosec [®]) | Heartburn |
| Polyethylene glycol (MiraLax [®]) | Constipation |
| Ketotifen (Zaditor [®]) | Itchy eyes due to allergies |
| Cetirizine (Zyrtec [®]) | Allergy and hives |
| Miconazole (Monistat [®]) | Vaginal yeast infection |
| Ibuprofen (Advil [®] , Motrin [®]) | Pain and fever |