

Biosimilar etanercept now available – Important information for consumers

Are you on etanercept (Enbrel[®]) for rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis or psoriatic arthritis? If so, you should be aware that a new biosimilar brand of etanercept is now available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). This version is marketed under the brand name Brenzys[®]. You should discuss brand choice with your rheumatologist.

About Enbrel[®] and Brenzys[®]

Brenzys[®] is a biosimilar of Enbrel[®]. This means that it is a highly similar, although not identical version of Enbrel[®] (see: *About biosimilar medicines*).

The Therapeutic Goods Administration has determined that Enbrel[®] and Brenzys[®] are comparable in terms of quality, safety and effectiveness and can be used to treat the same conditions. However, Brenzys[®] is not available for juvenile idiopathic arthritis.

Studies show that people receiving Enbrel[®] who switch to Brenzys[®] continue to have comparable treatment results.

Brenzys is the first biosimilar medicine in Australia that is available through community pharmacy.

Making an informed decision

It is important that you and your rheumatologist make an informed decision about which brand of etanercept you should receive (Enbrel[®] or Brenzys[®]) and whether it is appropriate for you to switch from one brand to another. Talk to your rheumatologist to discuss which brand is right for you (see: *Five steps to make sure you get the right medicine*).

About biosimilar medicines

A biosimilar medicine is a copy of a biologic medicine that has been shown to be highly similar to the original medicine.

The nature of biologic medicines means they cannot be copied exactly. Biologic medicines are complex and are produced using living cells so they are naturally variable and there can be minor differences between brands and batches. This is why competitor brands are called biosimilars.

Biosimilar medicines are comprehensively evaluated to establish that they are comparable to the original biologic medicine in terms of quality, safety and effectiveness.

Biosimilar medicines reduce the cost of expensive biologic medicines by creating market competition. The savings allow the government to subsidise more medicines or spend more on other areas of health care.

More biosimilar medicines for arthritis treatment will become available in future.

Substitution at the pharmacy level

Enbrel[®] and Brenzys[®] may be substituted at the pharmacy level. This means that your pharmacist may offer you a choice of brands, as they do with generic brands.

You can choose which brand you wish to receive and you should discuss brand choice with your rheumatologist. Your rheumatologist can tick a box on your script to say that brand substitution is not permitted, if you should only take a particular brand.

It is important for you and your rheumatologist to keep track of which brand of etanercept you receive. This is because switching from Enbrel[®] to Brenzys[®] has been shown to achieve comparable treatment results, but less is known about the impact of switching between these products many times.

Arthritis Australia recommends five steps you can take to make sure you get the medicine that is right for you.

Five steps to make sure you get the right medicine

1. Talk to your rheumatologist about your biologic medicine and whether a biosimilar might be right for you.
2. Decide in consultation with your rheumatologist whether you should keep taking the same brand of biologic/biosimilar or whether you could consider substitution.
3. You and your doctor decide may decide that you need to keep taking the same brand of biologic/biosimilar medicine. If so, make sure your rheumatologist prescribes by brand and ticks the 'Brand substitution not permitted' box on your script. Tell your pharmacist that you want the medication that is on the script and that you do not authorise any substitution.
4. Keep a record of the medicine you are taking and advise your rheumatologist if there is any change in the brand you receive from the pharmacy. An easy way to do this is to keep the packaging of the medicine or take a photograph and show it to your rheumatologist at your next consultation.
5. Keep informed about this issue by visiting www.arthritisaustralia.com.au

For more information:

www.arthritisaustralia.com.au
www.health.gov.au/biosimilars

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Your local Arthritis Office has information, education and support for people with arthritis

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