GoodHealthOutcomes.org
A Telehealth Company for Select Customers
1317 Edgewater Drive Suite 5236
Orlando, FL 32804
Voice 904.590.9598, Fax 317.342.5462
Email: Contact@GoodHealthOutcomes.org

How to Save Money on Prescription Medications

Prescription medications are essential for managing your health, but the costs can quickly add up. Whether you have health insurance, a high-deductible plan, or no coverage at all, there are several highly effective, proven strategies you can use to lower your out-of-pocket expenses at the pharmacy counter.

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1. Always Ask for the Generic Equivalent

Generic medications contain the exact same active ingredients, dosage, safety, and strength as their brand-name counterparts, but they typically cost 75% to 85% less.

- **Action Step:** Ask your healthcare provider to write your prescription as "substitution permissible," or ask your pharmacist if a generic version is available before your prescription is filled.

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2. Utilize Prescription Discount Cards

Never pay the standard retail cash price for a medication without checking a discount tool first. Services like **GoodRx, SingleCare,** and **PharmacyChecker** aggregate pre-negotiated discount prices.

- **How it works:** Search for your specific medication, dosage, and zip code on their app or website. Show the generated coupon or voucher to your pharmacist.
- **Pro-Tip:** Sometimes, the discount card price is actually cheaper than your standard insurance copay. Ask the pharmacist to run both to compare. *(Note: Discount cards cannot be combined with health insurance; you must choose one or the other for that transaction).*

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3. Compare Prices Across Different Pharmacies

The cost of the exact same medication can vary drastically from one pharmacy chain to another.

- **Big Box vs. Grocery:** Large retailers (like Costco, Sam's Club, or Walmart) and major grocery chains often have much lower base prices or special "$4 generic" lists compared to traditional standalone drugstores.
- **Membership Not Required:** In many states, you do not need to be a pharmacy member to use the pharmacy at warehouse clubs like Costco or Sam's Club.

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4. Request a 90-Day Supply

If you take a maintenance medication for a chronic condition (such as high blood pressure, cholesterol, or diabetes), ask your provider to write a prescription for a 90-day supply instead of a 30-day supply.

- **The Benefit:** Frequently there is a price break for bulk fills, giving you three months of medication for the price of two copays. It also saves you trips to the pharmacy.

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5. Explore Insurance Formularies and Mail-Order: Valuable if an insurance policy is paying for your prescription medications.
Every health insurance plan has a formulary—a specific list of preferred medications they choose to cover.

- **Tier Optimization:** Medications are grouped into tiers (Tier 1 is usually the cheapest generic; Tier 4 is a costly specialty drug). If your drug is on a high tier, ask your provider if there is a therapeutic alternative sitting on Tier 1.
- **Mail-Order Benefits:** Most insurance providers partner with a preferred mail-order pharmacy. Utilizing this service often secures deeper discounts on your regular maintenance medications and ships them directly to your door.

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6. Look Into Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs)
If you are prescribed a costly, brand-name specialty medication that lacks a generic version, look into assistance programs directly from the source.

- **Manufacturer Co-pay Cards:** Drug manufacturers frequently offer co-pay savings cards for commercially insured patients that can drop your out-of-pocket cost down to $0 or $5 a month.
- **Patient Assistance Programs:** For uninsured or low-income patients, pharmaceutical company non-profits often provide medications entirely free of charge if you meet their eligibility criteria.

Before You Leave your Telehealth Visit: The easiest way to save money is to talk openly with your healthcare provider during your visit. Simply saying, *"I want to make sure I can afford this medication, can we check if there is a low-cost generic option first?"* allows them to tailor your treatment plan to your budget.

At Good Health Outcomes Telehealth Services, we are dedicated to helping you find the most cost-effective treatments for your health challenges. Let's work together to help support this effort.

The above information was reviewed and validated by David Campbell-O'Dell, DNP, APRN-IP, FNP-BC, FAANP