

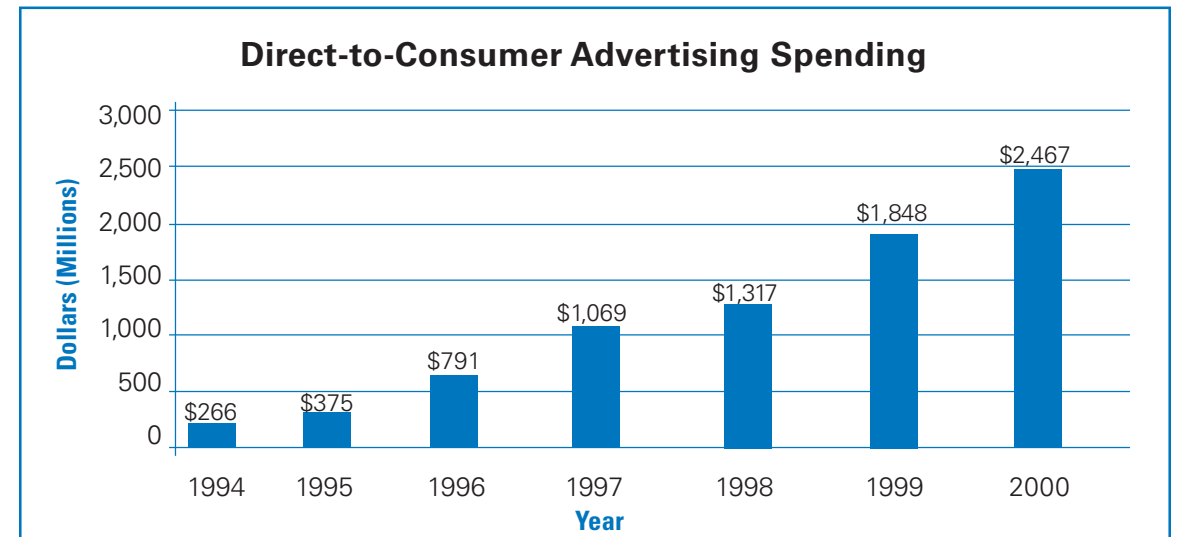
Prescription Drug Ads | What you should know

Turn on your television, and you're likely to see a commercial for the latest heartburn medication. Flip open a magazine and you'll find ads for a new allergy drug. Browse through the newspaper and a full-page ad promotes the benefits of a breakthrough cholesterol-lowering medication.

More than ever, drug makers are pitching their prescription products directly to consumers instead of relying on doctors to spread the word; however, there are many things you need to consider when you hear or see an ad about prescription drugs.

Advantages of advertising

- The ads provide important health information and help consumers make better health care decisions.
- When a condition is featured in an ad, it becomes less embarrassing or "taboo." As a result, people who have the condition find it easier to get help and speak openly with the doctor.
- Consumers become more educated about the symptoms of a disease through the ads and are more likely to seek treatment early.
- Studies have found that the ads help remind patients to keep taking the medicines their doctors prescribe.



Prescription Drug Ads | What you should know



Nonprofit corporations and independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

Some facts

- Only the United States and New Zealand permit advertising of prescription medicines to consumers. In the U.S., the FDA relaxed restrictions in 1997 on what drug companies could say in broadcast and print ads, leading to the present flood.
- In 2000, pharmaceutical companies spent \$15.7 billion promoting prescription drugs, including \$2.5 billion via direct-to-consumer advertising. The chart included in this brochure illustrates how pharmaceutical companies have increased the amount of money spent on direct-to-consumer advertising.
- Pharmaceutical companies spend twice as much on advertising as on research and development, according to a study by the consumer health organization Families USA.
- The 50 most heavily advertised drugs had combined sales of \$41.3 billion or 31.1 percent of all retail prescription drug sales in 2000.
- Prescription drug ads rarely mention lifestyle changes or other nondrug interventions, which are often as important as drug therapy in improving outcomes.

- Ads don't provide complete information to consumers. TV ads have time limits and print ads have limited space. As a result, they can give you some information about a medication but not the whole picture.

Why your doctor may not prescribe the medication you saw on TV

You may need a medication but not necessarily the one in the ad you see or hear. There are several good reasons why the medication in the ad may not be the right one for you.

It may be brand new on the market

Patients are increasingly hearing about new drugs before their doctors do. A recent poll by the American Association of Retired Persons found that 21 percent of consumers had asked their doctors for prescription drugs that the doctors knew little or nothing about. As one example, sales of the arthritis pain relief drug Celebrex[®] reached \$1 billion even before the final clinical-trial results were published in a medical journal.

It may be one choice of many

The medication you saw in the ad might be just one in a class of many drugs. A "drug class" is a group of medications that work pretty much the same but have different chemical ingredients. A different drug in the same class might work better for you. With some conditions, medications are prescribed in a particular order based on the severity of the condition.

It may be the wrong medication

Imagine seeing an advertisement for an antidepressant and deciding that your symptoms suggest you may have depression. However, a trip to the doctor results in a careful history and physical exam and concludes that you suffer from low thyroid levels. The antidepressant would not have helped your condition.

It could be a dangerous drug for you

As with any prescription drug you take, you need to be aware of any contraindications, drug interactions or side effects that may harm you. A contraindication is a condition that indicates that a drug should not be used. TV commercials are too short to point out every contraindication, side effect and possible drug interaction that may occur.

Vital information in magazine and newspaper ads is usually in tiny print and easily missed.

It may cause side effects

Medications are chemicals. They have many positive effects, and they can also produce unwanted side effects. Side effects are different for every person taking a drug. Your doctor may choose your medication based on its potential for causing side effects, and what those side effects might be.

Remember...

When you visit your physician, please keep these facts in mind, and realize that your doctor knows you better than the pharmaceutical companies.

Pharmacists are a great source of information about medications. If you want to know more about a drug, go to or call your local pharmacy and ask to speak to a pharmacist.

To get the most out of your Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network prescription drug coverage, ask for generics!