

What are Promotional Samples?

Samples are packets of a few tablets of new, brand-name medications that pharmaceutical company salespeople leave at your doctor's office as a way to promote new product lines. They usually do not contain more than a few doses. If you have ever used samples, you know that it takes several packets to cover even one month's supply.

Pharmaceutical companies hope that if a patient starts taking a sample of a new drug, the physician will continue to write a prescription for that drug after the sample runs out. There are no generic samples. Once a drug loses patent protection, its samples disappear.



The Unbranded Doctor Campaign of the National Physicians Alliance represents a network of physicians across America who believe that medical offices should not accept or display free promotional products from industry salespeople. Even small gifts have been shown to influence medical decision-making and undermine best practice.

To join our campaign, visit www.npalliance.org.

To learn more:

National Physicians Alliance

www.npalliance.org

The Prescription Project

www.prescriptionproject.org

American Medical Student Association

www.amsa.org

THE UNBRANDED DOCTOR

Why is My Doctor Restricting the Use of Promotional Samples?



Why is Our Practice Restricting Samples?

- Having patients “try out” the latest medicine rather than take one with a long safety record is riskier; the new drug may later be found to have serious side effects.
- Though “free” at first, samples do not really save patients money; co-pays for new medicines are often higher, and you’ll end up paying more in the long run.
- The cost of promotional samples is passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices for brand-name drugs. Patients in the U.S. pay more for prescriptions than in any other country, with the result that poor and elderly people do not always have access to the medicines they need. In short, samples are not really free.
- Research shows that samples are given more often to people with health insurance than to those without—including physicians’ families, friends, and office staff.
- Promotional samples encourage the use of the newest medications, which are often no better than an established version of the same drug, and which may be more expensive.
- As your doctor, I want to prescribe the safest and most effective medication for you at the lowest cost. Helping promote new industry products is not the job of the physician.

Frequently Asked Questions

What am I supposed to do now if I can’t afford my medicine? Many Americans earn too much money to qualify for medical assistance but not enough to pay for health insurance or prescriptions. Ask your doctor about available drug assistance programs.

What if I need to try a new medication and don’t want to pay the co-pay for a small supply? If you and I (as your physician) want to try you on a new medication, I will write you for a full-length prescription. Most drugs are well tolerated. If the drug doesn’t work for you, simply notify the practice and flush the remaining pills.

What if I disagree with this policy? Our practice is following the lead of a number of large hospitals and medical societies in adopting this policy. We believe it is in the best interest of our patients to limit the influence of marketing on medical decision-making. We are happy to talk with you about it.