

Biologics & Biosimilars

About Biologics

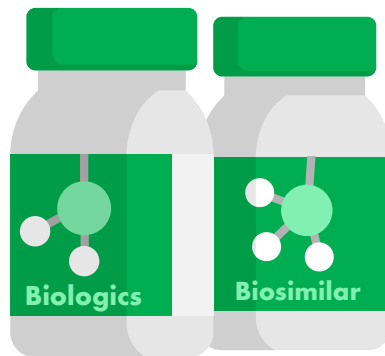
Biologics can help protect your joints and overall health by slowing or stopping the inflammation that causes damage. In autoimmune, inflammatory types of arthritis, the immune system stops working as it should. It creates too much inflammation in the body that causes pain, swelling, joint damage and other symptoms. Biologics are powerful medicines that block the parts of the immune system causing damage. This slows or stops the overactive inflammation.

There are several types of biologic medicines, each working in a different way to calm the overactive immune response that causes joint damage. Some block harmful proteins, while others change how immune cells send signals to each other.

Doctors may recommend a biologic if other treatments haven't worked well, or sometimes as the first treatment if the disease is very active or causing serious problems. Biologics can be very effective in reducing symptoms and protecting joints, but they can also be costly.

About Biosimilars

A biosimilar is a medicine designed to work in the same way as an existing biologic and provide the same health benefits. Biosimilars are made to be just as safe and effective, offering more treatment options and often at a lower cost.



Like biologics, biosimilars are large, complex molecules made in living cells. Because living cells can't be copied exactly, biosimilars are not identical to the original biologic — but they are highly similar, with no meaningful differences in safety. Biologics and their biosimilars are usually used to treat the same conditions.

Biosimilars are just as safe and effective as their reference products (original biologics). So, insurers may decide they only want to cover biosimilars. If you're worried about the change, speak to your doctor about your options.

➔ BEFORE YOU START

- Let your doctor know if you have an infection or if you've lived in areas where certain fungal infections are common, like parts of the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys, Texas or central New York. This helps your care team choose the safest treatment for you.
- Get screened for tuberculosis and hepatitis B virus.
- Stay up to date on your vaccines but ask your doctor first about risks from live vaccines.

For More Information

Biologics & Biosimilars
arthritis.org/biosimilars

Arthritis Foundation Helpline:
800-283-7800
arthritis.org/helpline

Taking Biologics and Biosimilars

Biologic and biosimilar drugs come in the form of an injection or IV infusion. A patient (or parent) gives shots at home. Infusions are given by a health care provider in a clinic or doctor's office. Many injection biologics and biosimilars use prefilled syringes with an easy-to-use auto-injector. They need to be refrigerated.

Side Effects of Biologics and Biosimilars

Side effects vary by medication, but the most common side effects of biologics and biosimilars include:

- Headache
- Itching, redness, swelling or other reactions where the shot was given
- Reactions to an infusion, such as trouble breathing, fast or weak pulse, nausea or vomiting, can happen up to 24 hours after infusion.

Contact your doctor immediately if you have:

- Vision changes
- Red scaly patches
- Hives, rash, itching
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea.

Risks of Biologics and Biosimilars

Serious risks of taking biologics are not common. However, they can increase the risk of developing certain infections, like tuberculosis or hepatitis B, or of certain cancers, heart failure or multiple sclerosis. Even so, the benefits of these drugs outweigh the risks for most people.

Who Should Not Take Biologics or Biosimilars?

Women who are pregnant or nursing in general should not take these medications. Talk to your doctor if you are pregnant, nursing or could become pregnant. Also, you shouldn't use them if you are also taking antibiotics. The infection should be completely gone before starting or restarting a biologic or biosimilar.

FAQs

Are biologics and biosimilars interchangeable?

Biologics and their biosimilars are used for the same conditions and work in a similar way. A biosimilar is only automatically swapped for a biologic if the FDA has approved it as "interchangeable," which does not usually happen.

How much do these drugs cost?

It depends on your insurance. Generally, patients can get these medications with insurance, coupons or co-pay cards. Patients with Medicare should check with their doctor's office and by contacting Medicare to see if their medicine is covered, and what options they have if it isn't. If you need assistance paying for medications, reach out to your physician and/or the Arthritis Foundation Helpline at 800-283-7299 or [arthritis.org/helpline](https://www.arthritis.org/helpline).

Can I stop taking my biologic or biosimilar if my disease goes into remission?

For some people, these medications work so well that all signs of their disease go away. If your arthritis is in remission, your rheumatologist can work with you to figure out whether it might be safe to stop or lower your biologic dose. Remission is not the same as being cured, so be sure to let your doctor know immediately if you get joint swelling or pain again.

What should I expect if I start a biologic or biosimilar?

Biologic and biosimilar drugs come in the form of an injection or IV infusion. A patient (or parent) gives shots at home, and infusions are given by a health care professional in a clinic or doctor's office. Injections come with prefilled syringes or an easy-to-use auto-injector. They need to be refrigerated.