

Venlafaxine - Frequently Asked Questions

What is changing with venlafaxine?

Venlafaxine ER tablets have been added to the HealthPartners Preferred Drug List (Drug Formulary) as a step-therapy medication, replacing Effexor XR. **Venlafaxine ER will be considered a generic medication by HealthPartners.**

When will this change happen?

- For Commercial and Medicaid groups, Venlafaxine ER will be added and Effexor XR will be deleted on June 1, 2009 (no “new starts” with Effexor XR starting June 1, 2009).
- For the Medicare formulary - changes will take effect January 1, 2010, and are pending CMS approval for 2009. Refer to the 2009 HealthPartners Medicare Drug Formulary on healthpartners.com to determine the current formulary status.

What about current members? Are changes required? No.

Members currently using Effexor XR will be grandfathered (no changes are required), but we are encouraging them to use Venlafaxine ER.

What forms of Venlafaxine are available? Venlafaxine is available in several forms:

	Dosage form	Formulary Status*
Effexor XR	once-daily capsule	NF (Non-formulary)
Venlafaxine ER	once-daily tablet	ST (Formulary with step therapy)
Venlafaxine IR	immediate-release tablet, available generically	ST (Formulary with step therapy)

* Formulary status beginning on June 1, 2009

What is Venlafaxine ER?

- Venlafaxine ER is a once-daily tablet form of Venlafaxine. It is available in the same strengths as Effexor XR, and also a 225mg strength (37.5mg, 75mg, 150mg, and 225mg).
- Venlafaxine ER is FDA-approved based on comparisons to Effexor XR and is considered bio-equivalent when given with food. Blood levels may be slightly higher than Effexor XR when given on an empty stomach (both products should be given with food).
- Changes will need a new prescription (different forms are not considered equivalents).
- Venlafaxine ER is considered a brand-name medication in national drug files, but **Venlafaxine ER will be considered a generic by HealthPartners.**
- Prescribing information is available at www.vertablets.com/vert_pi.pdf.

What are the step-therapy criteria for Venlafaxine?

The step-therapy criteria for venlafaxine remains the same: Venlafaxine (IR and ER) is reserved for members with an inadequate response to other anti-depressant medications, generic bupropion, generic mirtazapine or for members previously stable on this medication.



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Why are these changes being made?

Changes are being made to promote higher-value medication options. Decisions were made by the HealthPartners Pharmacy and Therapeutics (P&T) Committee following a review of the efficacy, safety, and costs of these products.

What are the costs?

Venlafaxine ER costs are 27 percent less than Effexor XR. More savings are possible for the 225mg dose (Venlafaxine ER 225mg is 49% less costly than three Effexor XR 75mg capsules).

Will members pay more for Venlafaxine ER? How much will members save?

Most members will lower their co-pays. **Venlafaxine ER tablets are considered a generic medication by HealthPartners.** This example shows how Venlafaxine ER can lower co-pays.

	co-pay per month	co-pay per year
Effexor XR	\$35	\$420
Venlafaxine ER	\$12	\$144

This example is based on a plan with a \$35 co-pay for brands and a \$12 co-pay for generics. Members can save up to \$276 each year. Co-pays vary, but most members will see significant savings.

Are there clinical concerns changing from Effexor XR to Venlafaxine ER tablets?

These products are considered bioequivalent (by the FDA) when given with food, but blood levels with Venlafaxine ER may be slightly higher than Effexor XR when given on an empty stomach. Both products should be given with food.

How should providers write prescriptions for Venlafaxine?

New prescriptions can be written for “Venlafaxine ER” or “Venlafaxine ER tablets.”

Is Venlafaxine ER a generic?

Venlafaxine ER tablets are considered a brand-name medication in national drug files, but will be considered a generic by HealthPartners for determining member co-pays and provider reports.

When does Effexor XR go generic?

Generic Effexor XR is expected July 2010, with lower-cost generics expected January 2011.

Why not just add Venlafaxine ER, without deleting Effexor XR?

Just adding Venlafaxine ER would increase costs to HealthPartners.

How will changes by members be encouraged?

Letters are being sent to members currently using Effexor XR, encouraging them to discuss making a change with their provider if they are interested in using this similar medication with a lower co-pay.

What if a Member Needs Effexor XR? Coverage will depend on benefits.

Effexor XR is available for members with a non-formulary benefit. No authorization is needed, and this group generally pays a higher co-pay.

Authorizations can be requested for fully-insured members with “closed” plans who have inadequate control despite using Venlafaxine ER. Requests should be sent to HealthPartners Pharmacy Services using our standard request form, www.healthpartners.com/files/34431.pdf.

Where can I get more information about Venlafaxine ER? More information is available at:

- Venlafaxine ER, www.vertablets.com.
- Manufacturer medical information department, 1-888-299-1053, medinfo@ucb.com.
- Manufacturer letter re: bioequivalence studies, www.healthpartners.com/files/46397.pdf.