

DIMENSIONS[®]

New discounted online store makes it easier for you to get vitamins and supplements

Independent Health now offers name brand vitamins, supplements, and other natural products at discounted prices to our members through the website, www.yournaturaloptions.com. These products are available at manufacturer wholesale prices to our members through Lighthouse Naturals, LLC, a subsidiary of Independent Health Corporation.

According to Thomas Foels, M.D., medical director at Independent Health, there is growing evidence within the medical community regarding the many positive benefits of taking supplements, ranging from multivitamins, calcium, and vitamin D, to omega-3 fatty acids, fiber, probiotics, and zinc. He said such products are an important component of healthy living currently being embraced by approximately 150 million Americans.

"We are excited that our members are increasingly making proactive lifestyle choices," says Dr. Foels. "We believe that by making positive lifestyle choices such as eating better, exercising and taking the right vitamins or supplements in the right amounts, our members can reduce their risk of certain diseases and achieve optimal health."

Getting the right information about vitamins, supplements, and natural products can be a challenge, especially over the Internet. To support our members' efforts to live a healthy lifestyle, Independent Health's website (independenthealth.com) provides access to credible information from reliable third parties to assist our members in making responsible decisions about these products to best impact their health and quality of life. A product advisory board reviews the products to ensure they meet established criteria before they are made available on the site.

A healthy, diverse diet is the best way for people to get the nutrition they need. But vitamins and supplements may give individuals added insurance against disease. A review published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* recommends that all adults take a multivitamin daily, as well as follow a healthy diet, to ensure they receive optimal quantities of vitamins and minerals.

Talk to your doctor about incorporating vitamins and supplements into your lifestyle. If you would like to purchase vitamins, supplements and other natural products through the Lighthouse Naturals store, please visit www.yournaturaloptions.com.

The Pharmacy Benefit Dimensions newsletter is issued three times per year by Independent Health's Pharmacy Department.

Comments are welcome.

Please send any questions or comments to:

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Who to call with questions

Independent Health's Pharmacy Benefit Dimensions[®] has a special unit dedicated to servicing our PBM members. If you have any questions regarding any of your pharmacy benefit claims, please contact one of our Member Services representatives at (716) 635-7880 or 1-888-878-9172. Representatives are available to assist you Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. E.S.T.

Optimizing your prescription dollar

Prescriptions can be a significant part of your budget (even with prescription coverage). There are many ways available to save money on your prescriptions:

1. Use generic drugs
2. Tablet splitting program
3. Compare prices
4. Talk to your doctor and pharmacist

Generic drugs

Generic drugs are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as equivalent to their brand name versions. The average brand name prescription costs \$104 and the average generic prescription costs around \$21. Copayments for generics are likewise significantly less than those for brand name drugs.

Tablet splitting

Manufacturers often price all strengths of a given product the same. For example one Lexapro® 10 mg tablet costs virtually the same as one Lexapro® 20 mg tablet. By splitting the 20 mg tablet in half, a patient can get two doses for the price of one. Tablet splitting is available for several drugs to treat high cholesterol, high blood pressure and depression. Patients should talk to their doctors about tablet splitting. If he or she agrees, the patient can get a two-month supply for one copayment. In the process, your plan saves on the overall cost of the medication.

Compare prices

Some pharmacies now have lists of generic drugs which they provide for a reduced cost. For example, several pharmacies have a list of generic drugs available for \$4. For safety, it is still best to stick with one pharmacy and

always use your prescription card. If the pharmacy's price is less than your copayment, that is the price you will be charged.

Over-the-counter (OTC) medications

The FDA periodically reviews prescription drugs for over-the-counter distribution. This does not mean that these drugs are less than effective. The FDA merely determines they are safe to be sold without the supervision of a physician. Some examples include Claritin® (loratadine), Claritin-D® (loratadine/pseudoephedrine), Prilosec OTC®, Naphcon-A®, among others. If you have prescription drug coverage, your plan MAY cover select over-the-counter medications with a written prescription by your physician. If your plan does not have prescription drug coverage, you may find that the costs of many over-the-counter medications are less than the cost of a prescription alternative.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist. When your doctor is writing your prescription ask what tier the medication is in or how much it might cost. By reminding the physician that you're concerned about cost he or she can often review the formulary to determine if lower cost drugs are available to treat your conditions. The pharmacist can similarly help you find lower cost option. Sometimes, if you ask, your pharmacist may be able to work with your physician to change your prescription without requiring you to make another appointment with your physician.

Using any one of these methods could save a considerable amount of money at the pharmacy while maintaining high-quality health care.

Pharmacists now able to immunize in New York

Last September, Governor Paterson signed new legislation allowing pharmacists to immunize patients 18 years or older with pneumococcal or influenza vaccinations. In order to be authorized to immunize patients pursuant to a physician or nurse practitioners orders, pharmacists must be registered and certified to immunize in New York State.

This legislation is significant in that New York's adult immunization rate is near the bottom nationally. Allowing pharmacists to administer vaccines to adults will, in no

way, displace or replace traditional health care systems or providers. In fact, studies confirm that when pharmacists begin to immunize, physicians and nurses actually administer more, not fewer, immunizations.

Overall, this new legislation should improve an individual's wellness by expanding access to influenza and pneumococcal immunizations. With flu shot season now here, you may want to ask your pharmacist if they are certified to administer these vaccines.