

Nonprescription Nexium heartburn medicine launches (Update)

May 27 2014, by Linda A. Johnson

A nonprescription version of Nexium, the most popular medicine for frequent, severe heartburn, has just gone on sale.

Drugmaker Pfizer Inc. said Tuesday that over-the-counter Nexium 24HR is available for online orders at www.Nexium24HR.com and will be in most retailers nationwide within three days.

The nonprescription version is a 20-milligram dose of "the purple pill," known chemically as esomeprazole.

Patients are to take one pill daily for up to 14 days, so it's sold in packages of 14, 28 or 42 pills, priced at about \$15 to \$30. Prescription Nexium, which will still be available in 20- and 40-milligram strengths, costs \$260 a month or more, without insurance coverage.

New York-based Pfizer said it's planning consumer ads about the launch, which it's begun promoting at www.facebook.com/Nexium24HR . Pfizer also is offering \$1-off coupons for it on the website and www.coupons.com .

In 2012, Pfizer acquired exclusive worldwide rights to nonprescription Nexium from maker AstraZeneca PLC. The British drugmaker got a payment of \$250 million and will receive royalties and other payments based on the level of sales.

AstraZeneca will manufacture the nonprescription version for Pfizer and

continue selling prescription Nexium, which can take one to four days for full effect. It's heavily advertised as "the purple pill that can provide 24-hour relief from persistent heartburn" caused by acid reflux disease. Unlike antacids, Nexium blocks the "pumps" that release acid into the stomach.

The Food and Drug Administration approved over-the-counter Nexium 24HR two months ago.

Last year, Nexium was the sixth-best-selling prescription drug in the world, generating revenue of \$7.86 billion, up 7 percent from 2012 sales, according to health data firm IMS Health. Competition from the nonprescription version likely will reduce sales in the future.

Over the past month, Pfizer repeatedly courted AstraZeneca, offering as much as \$119 billion to buy the company in what would have been the biggest pharmaceutical acquisition ever. After repeated rebuffs, Pfizer ended its pursuit Monday.

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