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Skimpflation: Cough Syrup Strength Cut in Half

December 19, 2022 by Edgar (aka MrConsumer)

NOTE: The next new Mouse Print* story will be published on January 2nd.

Shrinkflation's evil twin is "skimpflation." That is when a manufacturer reformulates a product using less of the expensive components and sometimes substitutes less expensive ingredients. In other words, some products actually get watered down.



Store Brand Cough Syrup



Discovering that a product's recipe has changed is very difficult to detect. But regular reader Mark D. spotted a great example. Shopping at his local Kroger store he discovered that their store brand cough syrup had been diluted, now requiring you to take twice as much per dose.



We found that Kroger was not alone in doing this because various other chains are also changing the formula of their own brand of cough syrup.

Here are before and after CVS' versions of Tussin DM (a knockoff of Robitussin):

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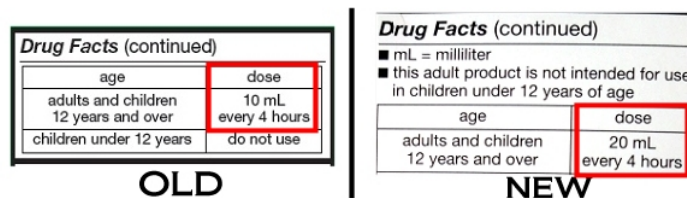


Only that tiny notation on the front panel that says “see new dosing” gives a clue to a change in the product. When checking the drug facts, comparing the ingredients in the old and the new product, the clever ploy is revealed.

***MOUSE PRINT:**



Now there is only half the amount of active ingredients in each bottle. Put another way, to get the same amount of the two active ingredients per dose, you now have to consume twice as much cough syrup – 20 ml per dose instead of the old 10 ml.



We asked CVS why it made the change, and a spokesperson responded in relevant part:

In 2021, when the national brand equivalent made changes to their formulation, including changes to flavor, a change in dosing, and removal of high fructose corn syrup, CVS also updated its formulation of CVS Health Brand Tussin-DM.

Best we can tell changes like this are occurring with other store brands including Walgreens. If there is any good news, it seems to have taken the store brands four or five years to realize that Robitussin changed its dosing around 2017. The spokesperson for Haleon, the maker of Robitussin, when asked why the formulation changed said:

Over the years the brand has launched new, innovative products and evolved to meet changing consumer needs. This includes in 2015 and thereafter, when the brand reformulated its Robitussin DM products to improve factors such as taste to allow for a better consumer experience.

None of the store brands is promoting the fact that with less medicine in every dose, the product is better tasting. But, they are benefiting financially because the product now gets used up twice as fast.

If you spot an instance where a product has been watered-down or cheaper ingredients have replaced more expensive ones, please let us know. Just send an email to Edgar (at symbol) ConsumerWorld.org . Try to include “before” and “after” pictures.

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9 thoughts on “<i>Skimp</i>flation: Cough Syrup Strength Cut in Half”



[Rodney J Plunkett](#)
[December 19, 2022 at 7:46 am](#)

A large share of Store Brand OTC (Over-the-Counter) drugs are made by a company in MI called Perrigo. They make product like the Tussin DM product for many/most large retailers like Kroger, CVS, Walgreens, Walmart (Equate), and Costco (Kirkland). Their mantra has always been to be NBE (National Brand Equivalent). I am somewhat surprised that it has taken this long to “catch up” to the brand. Store brands are not the culprit here, they are doing what they have always done, copy the brand. The real culprit is the brand, in this case Robitussin® and a consuming public that forces retailers’ products to be NBE, because they won’t even consider a store brand that isn’t NBE.



[E Shavit](#)
[December 19, 2022 at 8:20 am](#)

One would have to be a complete idiot to believe the silly explanations of the manufacturers courtesy of their public relations people. Most brands are nothing

but a commercial names, as they are produced on the same line for many retailers under different but similar names (as noted before by Rodney J Plunkett)



Burt Brooks
[December 19, 2022 at 8:26 am](#)

Delsym, the same reduction, I believe



Joel
[December 19, 2022 at 8:40 am](#)

It's hard to keep track of all the changes like this. Am I supposed to keep an Excel spreadsheet list of all the things I buy and what sizes and doses they come in? That would be extreme.

The best advice I can offer people is to be watchful when you go into the store, always be comparing prices and sizes (and now dosing), and make the best decision each time you go. In this case there isn't much a cautious buyer can do to stop this since all the brands are changing.



richard Ginn
[December 19, 2022 at 1:48 pm](#)

Yes you must.....

The size, the dose, and the price from multiple stores in your local area.

And you get to have all the fun updating it weekly.



Len
[December 19, 2022 at 12:24 pm](#)

Business as usual. Screw the consumer.



JonK
[December 26, 2022 at 11:27 am](#)

As Rodney Plunkett notes in his comment, this appears to be a universal skimpflation move among the store brands in response to a change by Robitussin, the brand-name product. We noticed it over a year ago with the Equate (Walmart) product and confirmed that other store brands had followed suit.



Oliver E Wayne

[January 13, 2023 at 10:24 am](#)

The Kroger version of the cough syrup used the USP version of the main ingredient ... the reformulated version was made with some cheaper version of the main ingredient that is not a pure as USP!



Oliver E Wayne

[January 13, 2023 at 10:43 am](#)

Yesterday I bought what I thought was a one pound jar of Skippy Peanut Butter at a local Fairway market that upon close inspection turned out to be a 15 ounce jar! The change in shape between the new 15 ounce jar and the old 16 ounce jar is slight and hard to notice. the product is called "Skippy Natural Creamy Peanut Butter" and bright red letters say "1/3 Less Sodium & Sugar", I could not find a notice saying "6% Less Peanut Butter" though.

Comments are closed.