

Thus familiarity may or may not breed contempt, but it definitely breeds expectations. Branding, packaging, and the reassurance of the caregiver can make us feel better. But what about price? Can the price of a drug also affect our response to it?

ON THE BASIS of price alone, it is easy to imagine that a \$4,000 couch will be more comfortable than a \$400 couch; that a pair of designer jeans will be better stitched and more comfortable than a pair from Wal-Mart; that a high-grade electric sander will work better than a low-grade sander; and that the roast duck at the Imperial Dynasty (for \$19.95) is substantially better than the roast duck at Wong's Noodle Shop (for \$10.95). But can such implied difference in quality influence the actual experience, and can such influence also apply to objective experiences such as our reactions to pharmaceuticals?

For instance, would a cheaper painkiller be less effective than a more expensive one? Would your winter cold feel worse if you took a discount cold medicine than if you took an expensive one? Would your asthma respond less well to a generic drug than to the latest brand-name on the market? In other words, are drugs like Chinese food, sofas, blue jeans, and tools? Can we assume that high price means higher quality, and do our expectations translate into the objective efficacy of the product?

This is a particularly important question. The fact is that you can get away with cheaper Chinese food and less expensive jeans. With some self-control, we can usually steer ourselves away from the most expensive brands. But will you really look for bargains when it comes to your health? Putting