



Merck & Company (MRK)

Updated February 3rd, 2024 by Nathan Parsh

Key Metrics

Current Price:	\$126	5 Year CAGR Estimate:	7.5%	Market Cap:	\$320 B
Fair Value Price:	\$128	5 Year Growth Estimate:	5.0%	Ex-Dividend Date:	03/15/24
% Fair Value:	99%	5 Year Valuation Multiple Estimate:	0.3%	Dividend Payment Date:	04/05/24
Dividend Yield:	2.4%	5 Year Price Target	\$163	Years Of Dividend Growth:	13
Dividend Risk Score:	B	Retirement Suitability Score:	B	Rating:	Hold

Overview & Current Events

Merck & Company is one of the largest healthcare companies in the world. Merck manufactures prescription medicines, vaccines, biologic therapies, and animal health products. Merck employs 68,000 people around the world and generates annual revenues of more than \$63 billion. On June 2nd, 2021, Merck completed its previously announced spinoff of its women's health and biosimilar portfolio into Organon & Co (OGN).

On July 16th, 2023, Merck completed its previously announced purchase of clinical-stage biotech company Prometheus (RXDX) for \$10.8 billion in cash. Prometheus will add to the company's position in immunology. Because the deal is being accounted for as an asset acquisition, Merck recorded a charge of nearly \$10.3 billion, or \$4.02 per share, in 2023.

On November 28th, 2023, Merck raised its quarterly dividend 5.5% to \$0.77.

On February 1st, 2024, Merck announced fourth quarter and full year results for the period ending December 31st, 2023. For the quarter, revenue grew 6% to \$14.6 billion, which beat estimates by \$120 million. Adjusted earnings-per-share was \$0.03 compared to \$1.62 in the prior year, but this was \$0.14 more than expected. For 2023, revenue grew 1% to \$60.1 billion while adjusted earnings-per-share totaled \$1.69.

Lagevrio sales declined 76% to \$193 million due to lower demand in Japan and nonrecurrence of sales in the U.K.

Keytruda, which treats cancers such as melanoma that cannot be removed by surgery and non-small cell lung cancer, remains the key driver of growth for the company, had sales growth of 22% to \$6.6 billion. The product generated \$25 billion in 2023, up from \$20.9 billion in the prior year. Sales for Merck's HPV vaccine *Gardasil* were up 27% to \$1.9 billion. Animal Health grew 4% to \$1.3 billion due to improved demand for companion animal products.

Merck provided guidance for 2024 as well. The company expects sales in a range of \$62.7 billion to \$64.2 billion while adjusted earnings-per-share are projected to be in a range of \$8.44 to \$8.59. We have initiated our forecast accordingly.

Growth on a Per-Share Basis

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2029
EPS	\$3.49	\$3.59	\$3.78	\$3.98	\$4.34	\$5.19	\$5.94	\$6.02	\$7.48	\$1.69	\$8.52	\$10.87
DPS	\$1.76	\$1.80	\$1.84	\$1.88	\$1.99	\$2.20	\$2.48	\$2.64	\$2.76	\$2.96	\$3.08	\$3.93
Shares¹	2838	2781	2749	2697	2650	2603	2536	2535	2548	2533	2533	2500

Merck's earnings declined during the last recession and it took the company several years to return to growth. Excluding last year's unique situation with Prometheus, Merck had earnings-per-share growth of nearly 9% for the 2013 to 2022 period, though much of this growth has occurred in the near-term. Merck has struggled to grow earnings as patents for drugs have expired, but *Keytruda* has shown very high rates of growth in recent reporting periods. *Keytruda* has patent protection in the U.S. until 2028, in the European Union until 2030, and in Japan until 2032. In addition, the company's spinoff of Organon should allow for a higher growth as Merck focuses on its pharmaceutical, vaccines and animal health businesses. For now, we maintain our estimate of 5% earnings growth over the next five years. Merck has increased its dividend for 13 consecutive years.

¹ In millions of shares

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On August 16th, 2022, the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 was signed into law. The law will, in part, require the federal government to negotiate prices for drugs covered under Medicare starting in 2026. This could reduce the profits pharmaceutical companies could collect, but these costs could be shifted to employer sponsored plans, reducing the negative impact on businesses. As such, we maintain our expected growth rates, but will monitor the situation as we get closer to the implementation of the law.

Valuation Analysis

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Now	2029
Avg. P/E	16.4	15.8	15.2	15.6	14.8	15.9	13.6	12.7	14.8	64.5	14.8	15.0
Avg. Yld.	3.1%	3.2%	3.2%	3.0%	3.0%	2.7%	3.0%	3.4%	2.5%	2.7%	2.4%	2.4%

Shares of Merck have increased \$23, or 22.3%, since our November 14th, 2023 update. Based off earnings estimates for the current year, the stock has a forward P/E ratio of 14.8. Merck's long-term average P/E ratio is 14.4. Due to growth rates of key products, particularly *Keytruda*, we believe shares could trade with a price-to-earnings ratio of 15 by 2029. If shares were to revert to this target by 2029, then valuation would be 0.3% tailwind to total annual returns.

Safety, Quality, Competitive Advantage, & Recession Resiliency

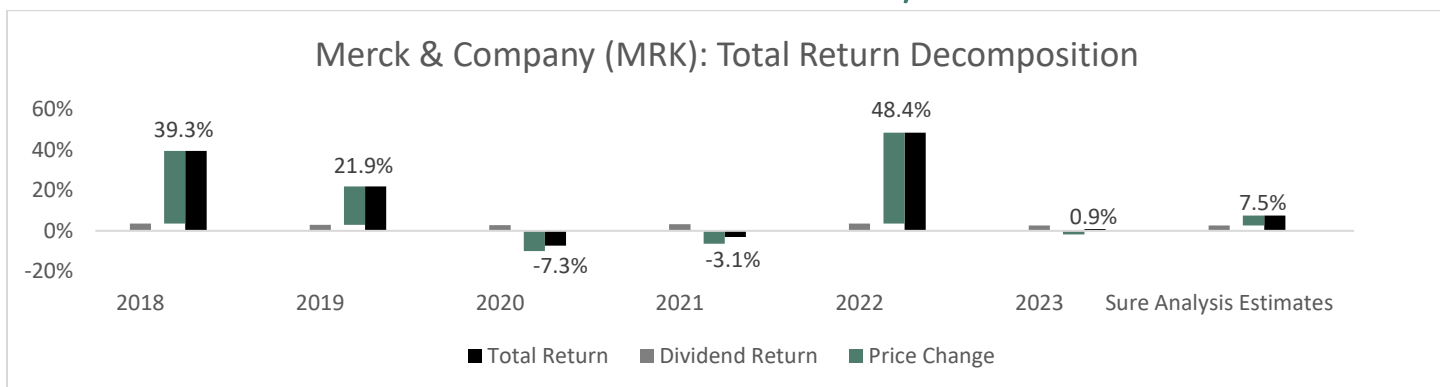
Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2029
Payout	50%	50%	49%	47%	46%	42%	42%	44%	37%	175%	36%	36%

Many investors consider pharmaceutical companies "defensive" stocks because their products are in demand even in a protracted recession. The thinking goes that sick people will seek treatment for illnesses even in poor economic conditions, causing earnings to increase. While this is true for many names in this industry, Merck's earnings declined in 2009 and suffered a subsequently long road back to profitability that this is not necessarily true for every healthcare corporation. With that said, Merck's key competitive advantage is that it is seeing strong growth rates in key product areas. While generic competition is putting pressure on certain pharmaceuticals, we find *Keytruda*'s growth rate and peak sales expectations very appealing. Merck is also one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world, which gives the company size and scale. If needed, the company would likely have the ability to acquire other assets. Merck has also spent heavily (16% to 19% of sales) on research and development over the past five years.

Final Thoughts & Recommendation

Merck & Company is expected to offer a total annual return of 7.5% through 2029, up from 5.1% previously. This projected return stems from expected earnings growth of 5%, a starting yield of 2.4%, and a small contribution from multiple expansion. Merck's top selling products continue to produce strong growth rates. That said, we continue to rate shares of Merck as a hold due to projected returns.

Total Return Breakdown by Year



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Income Statement Metrics

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Revenue	44033	42237	39498	39807	40122	42294	46840	47994	48704	59283
Gross Profit	27079	25469	24564	25777	27210	28785	32728	32509	35078	41872
Gross Margin	61.5%	60.3%	62.2%	64.8%	67.8%	68.1%	69.9%	67.7%	72.0%	70.6%
SG&A Exp.	11911	11606	10313	10017	10074	10102	10615	10468	9634	10042
D&A Exp.	6988	6691	6375	5471	4676	4519	3652	3625	3214	3909
Operating Profit	7665	6683	7547	5499	6797	8931	12241	8483	13199	18282
Op. Margin	17.4%	15.8%	19.1%	13.8%	16.9%	21.1%	26.1%	17.7%	27.1%	30.8%
Net Profit	4404	11920	4442	3920	2394	6220	9843	7067	13049	14519
Net Margin	10.0%	28.2%	11.2%	9.8%	6.0%	14.7%	21.0%	14.7%	26.8%	24.5%
Free Cash Flow	10106	5672	11255	8762	4563	8307	9967	5569	9661	14707
Income Tax	1028	5349	942	718	4103	2508	1687	1709	1521	1918

Balance Sheet Metrics

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total Assets	105645	98167	101677	95377	87872	82637	84397	91588	105694	109160
Cash & Equivalents	15621	7441	8524	6515	6092	7965	9676	8062	8096	12694
Acc. Receivable	7184	6626	6484	7018	6873	7071	6778	7851	9230	9450
Inventories	6226	5571	4700	4866	5096	5440	5978	6310	5953	5911
Goodwill & Int.	36102	33378	40325	35467	32467	31357	33621	34842	44197	41473
Total Liabilities	53319	49376	56910	55069	53303	55755	58396	66184	67437	63102
Accounts Payable	2274	2625	2533	2807	3102	3318	3738	4594	4609	4264
Long-Term Debt	25060	21403	26412	24842	24410	25114	26346	31791	33102	30691
Total Equity	49765	48647	44676	40088	34336	26701	25907	25317	38184	45991
LTD/E Ratio	0.50	0.44	0.59	0.62	0.71	0.94	1.02	1.26	0.87	0.67

Profitability & Per Share Metrics

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Return on Assets	4.2%	11.7%	4.4%	4.0%	2.6%	7.3%	11.8%	8.0%	13.2%	13.5%
Return on Equity	8.6%	24.2%	9.5%	9.2%	6.4%	20.4%	37.4%	27.6%	41.1%	34.5%
ROIC	5.7%	16.2%	6.3%	5.8%	3.9%	11.2%	18.9%	12.9%	20.3%	19.6%
Shares Out.	2928	2838	2781	2749	2697	2650	2603	2536	2535	2548
Revenue/Share	14.70	14.43	13.90	14.28	14.60	15.79	18.16	18.89	19.19	23.32
FCF/Share	3.37	1.94	3.96	3.14	1.66	3.10	3.86	2.19	3.81	5.79

Note: All figures in millions of U.S. Dollars unless per share or indicated otherwise.

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