



Merck & Company (MRK)

Updated April 29th, 2024 by Nathan Parsh

Key Metrics

Current Price:	\$131	5 Year CAGR Estimate:	6.8%	Market Cap:	\$332 B
Fair Value Price:	\$129	5 Year Growth Estimate:	5.0%	Ex-Dividend Date:	06/14/24 ¹
% Fair Value:	102%	5 Year Valuation Multiple Estimate:	-0.3%	Dividend Payment Date:	07/10/24 ²
Dividend Yield:	2.4%	5 Year Price Target	\$164	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 November 28th, 2023, Merck raised its quarterly dividend 5.5% to \$0.77.

On April 25th, 2024, Merck reported first quarter results for the period ending March 31st, 2024. For the quarter, revenue improved 9% to \$15.8 billion, which topped expectations by \$600 million. Adjusted earnings-per-share was \$2.07 compared to \$1.40 in the prior year and was \$0.15 ahead of estimates.

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 and had revenue growth of 20% to \$6.9 billion during the period. The product generated \$25 billion in 2023, up from \$20.9 billion in the prior year. Sales for Merck's HPV vaccine *Gardasil* were higher by 14% to \$2.2 billion. Animal Health grew 1% to \$1.5 billion as higher prices in Livestock and Companion Animal products were partially offset by weaker volume. *Lagevrio*, which treats mild-to-moderate Covid-19, experienced a sales decline of 11% to \$350 million as lower demand in certain Asia Pacific markets was only partially offset by gains in Japan and the U.S.

Merck provided guidance for 2024 as well. The company expects sales in a range of \$63.1 billion to \$64.3 billion, up from \$62.7 billion to \$64.2 billion previously. Adjusted earnings-per-share are projected to be in a range of \$8.53 to \$8.65, up from \$8.44 to \$8.59 previously. We have updated 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	\$8.59	\$10.96
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
Shares³	2838	2781	2749	2697	2650	2603	2536	2535	2548	2533	2544	2530

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 Estimated ex-dividend date

² Estimate dividend payment date

³ 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	15.3	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 decreased \$5, or 4.0%, since our February 3rd, 2024 update. Based off earnings estimates for the current year, the stock has a forward P/E ratio of 15.3. 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% headwind to total annual returns.

Safety, Quality, Competitive Advantage, & Recession Resiliency

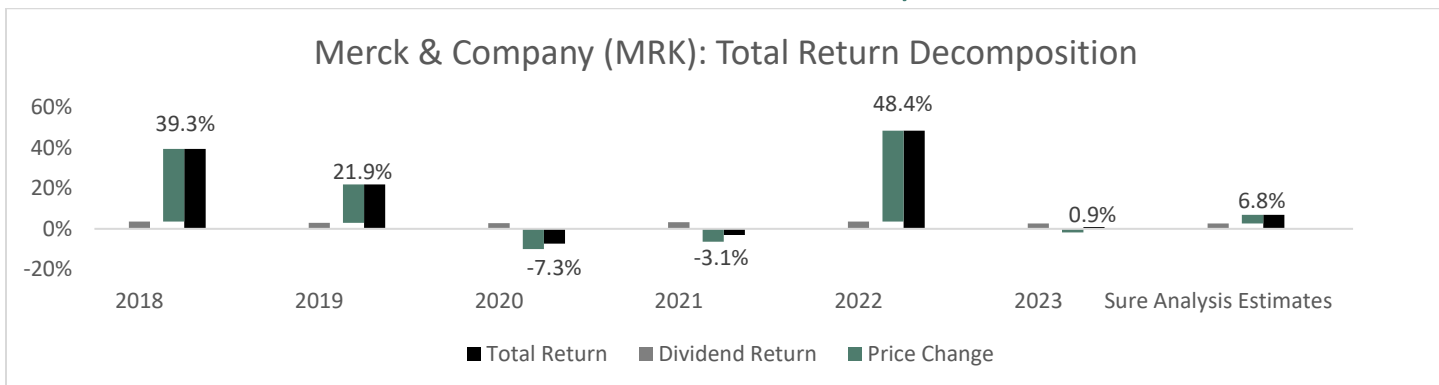
Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2029
Payout	50%	50%	49%	47%	46%	42%	42%	44%	37%	175%	36%	36%

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 6.8% through 2029, down from 7.5% previously. This projected return stems from expected earnings growth of 5% and a starting yield of 2.4%, offset by a small headwind from multiple expansion. Merck's top selling products, especially *Keytruda*, 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	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Revenue	42237	39498	39807	40122	42294	46840	47994	48704	59283	60115
Gross Profit	25469	24564	25777	27210	28785	32728	32509	35078	41872	43989
Gross Margin	60.3%	62.2%	64.8%	67.8%	68.1%	69.9%	67.7%	72.0%	70.6%	73.2%
SG&A Exp.	11606	10313	10017	10074	10102	10615	10468	9634	10042	10504
D&A Exp.	6691	6375	5471	4676	4519	3652	3625	3214	3909	3872
Operating Profit	6683	7547	5499	6797	8931	12241	8483	13199	18282	2954
Op. Margin	15.8%	19.1%	13.8%	16.9%	21.1%	26.1%	17.7%	27.1%	30.8%	4.9%
Net Profit	11920	4442	3920	2394	6220	9843	7067	13049	14519	365
Net Margin	28.2%	11.2%	9.8%	6.0%	14.7%	21.0%	14.7%	26.8%	24.5%	0.6%
Free Cash Flow	5672	11255	8762	4563	8307	9967	5569	9661	14707	9143
Income Tax	5349	942	718	4103	2508	1687	1709	1521	1918	1512

Balance Sheet Metrics

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total Assets	98167	101677	95377	87872	82637	84397	91588	105694	109160	106675
Cash & Equivalents	7441	8524	6515	6092	7965	9676	8062	8096	12694	6841
Acc. Receivable	6626	6484	7018	6873	7071	6778	7851	9230	9450	10349
Inventories	5571	4700	4866	5096	5440	5978	6310	5953	5911	6358
Goodwill & Int.	33378	40325	35467	32467	31357	33621	34842	44197	41473	39208
Total Liabilities	49376	56910	55069	53303	55755	58396	66184	67437	63102	69040
Accounts Payable	2625	2533	2807	3102	3318	3738	4594	4609	4264	3922
Long-Term Debt	21403	26412	24842	24410	25114	26346	31791	33102	30691	35055
Total Equity	48647	44676	40088	34336	26701	25907	25317	38184	45991	37581
LTD/E Ratio	0.44	0.59	0.62	0.71	0.94	1.02	1.26	0.87	0.67	0.93

Profitability & Per Share Metrics

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Return on Assets	11.7%	4.4%	4.0%	2.6%	7.3%	11.8%	8.0%	13.2%	13.5%	0.3%
Return on Equity	24.2%	9.5%	9.2%	6.4%	20.4%	37.4%	27.6%	41.1%	34.5%	0.9%
ROIC	16.2%	6.3%	5.8%	3.9%	11.2%	18.9%	12.9%	20.3%	19.6%	0.5%
Shares Out.	2838	2781	2749	2697	2650	2603	2536	2535	2548	2533
Revenue/Share	14.43	13.90	14.28	14.60	15.79	18.16	18.89	19.19	23.32	23.60
FCF/Share	1.94	3.96	3.14	1.66	3.10	3.86	2.19	3.81	5.79	3.59

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

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