

# Medication Resources *for* Quitting Tobacco

Nicotine is a powerful drug and the addiction to it is difficult to break. There are, however, many products on the market – both over-the-counter and by prescription – to help you quit, and many people have found them to be useful. These products are described here, along with their benefits and side effects. As with all types of medication, it is important to follow your doctor's advice and use products only according to the label, or as prescribed.

## Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)

If you are 18 or older you can buy NRT without a doctor's prescription. If you are on Medicaid or the State Employee Health Plan, NRT is covered if you have a prescription from a doctor. Your insurance provider may have similar benefits. NRT comes in different doses. When you have been off tobacco for awhile, you should be able to decrease the dose of NRT as your craving for nicotine lessens. You may want to keep backup NRT with you for at least a year, however, in case you have a sudden urge or craving. Always read the package instructions before using any form of NRT.

If you have had a recent heart attack, chest pain or serious abnormal heart beats, you should check with your doctor before using any NRT product.

If you are pregnant or breast-feeding, you should talk with your doctor before using NRT. If you can, it's best to try quitting tobacco use without medications. The drug Chantix has not been studied in pregnant or nursing women and is not recommended for them.



## Over-the-Counter NRT Products

### NICOTINE PATCH

The patch doesn't work as fast as a cigarette, but after a few hours, it will work all day. You put it on just like a band-aid, and nicotine enters the body by passing through the skin. The patch comes in three different doses, and when you use the correct dose, you may have fewer withdrawal symptoms such as stress, bad temper, drowsiness and difficulty staying focused:

- If you smoke 1 pack per day or more, use the high dose (21 mg) patch.
- If you smoke less than 10 cigarettes a day, try using the lowest dose (7 mg) patch.
- If you smoke more than 10 cigarettes a day but less than a pack, try using the medium dose (14 mg) patch.

The patch must be worn all day, and should not be removed to smoke. One brand, Nicotrol, is only worn while awake and then is removed for sleep.

Most patches are changed every 24 hours. Skin irritation at the patch site and difficulty sleeping are the most common side effects.

The cost for the patch is \$80 to \$100 a month, or about \$4 a day. Less expensive generic (non-brand name) patches are now widely available.

### NICOTINE GUM

Nicotine gum gets nicotine to the brain more quickly than the patch, but it still takes several minutes before the craving is relieved.

Nicotine gum is not chewed like ordinary gum. For the gum to work correctly, you must chew it only until it feels slightly tingly or peppery. Then "park" the gum between your cheek and gum to allow the nicotine to enter your bloodstream through the cheek lining. If you continue to chew nicotine gum beyond the peppery/tingly feeling, the nicotine will be swallowed instead of absorbed, the craving for tobacco will not be relieved, and you might end up with a stomachache.

When the next craving occurs, "chew and park" again. Continue to "chew and park" until chewing no longer results in the peppery/tingly feeling. Then begin again with a new piece. Nicotine gum is available in two doses:

- 4 mg if you smoke more than 25 cigarettes a day, and
- 2 mg if you smoke less than 25 cigarettes a day.

Chew only the amount you need to avoid withdrawal symptoms and craving. Use no more than 24 pieces a day.

Once you are used to the gum, and you have quit tobacco use for a few weeks, you can then begin to cut back on the number of pieces you chew. You can also try to use a lower dose of

the gum. As you cut back, if you develop cravings again, return to the higher dose, or increase the number pieces per day until the craving is controlled.

It may take some trial and error for the gum to work for you. Most people find that once they learn how to use the gum effectively, after about 3 months they don't need it anymore. The following are some helpful hints:

- Some people don't use enough gum to control cravings. Therefore, chewing on a schedule may help. For instance, you can try using one piece every one to two hours for at least one to three months.
- Do not have anything to eat or drink except water for 15 minutes before or while using the gum. Especially avoid coffee, soft drinks and juice.
- If the gum sticks to your dental work, stop using it and check with your medical provider or dentist. Dentures or other dental work can be damaged by the gum's hard and sticky consistency.

Average cost of nicotine gum is \$150 to \$250 per month, or about \$4.50 a day.

### NICOTINE LOZENGES

Nicotine lozenges come in the form of hard candies that you allow to melt slowly in your mouth. The lozenge releases nicotine into the bloodstream

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through the lining of the mouth and lasts about 20 to 30 minutes. Nicotine will continue to enter the bloodstream for a short time after the lozenge has melted completely.

Nicotine lozenges are available in two different strengths based on when you smoke your first cigarette of the day:

- 4 mg if your first cigarette is smoked less than 30 minutes from waking; or
- 2 mg if your first cigarette is smoked more than 30 minutes after waking.

One lozenge equals one dose. You should not use more than 20 lozenges per day over a 12-week period, and try to use fewer and fewer lozenges as you progress. If you find you need to use the lozenges for longer than 12 weeks to combat craving, contact your health care provider. Be aware of these precautions when using nicotine lozenges:

- Biting or chewing the lozenge will cause an upset stomach and/or heartburn.
- Do not eat or drink anything (especially coffee, soft drinks or juice) 15 minutes before using, or while using the lozenge.
- Side effects include soreness of the teeth and gums, indigestion, throat irritation, coughing and difficulty sleeping.

The average cost of lozenge NRT is \$250 to \$500 per month, or \$6 to \$12 a day.

## Prescription NRT Products

### NICOTINE INHALER

The nicotine inhaler is a plastic mouthpiece with a nicotine-filled cartridge that mimics the look and feel of smoking a cigarette. The inhaler is used whenever you crave a cigarette, but when you inhale, it delivers nicotine into the mouth instead of the lungs.

The inhaler delivers nicotine more slowly to the body than a cigarette, but it is often very helpful for someone who has a strong hand-to mouth association with cigarettes. A dose is one puff, and it takes about 80 puffs to equal the amount of nicotine in one cigarette. You should use no more than 16 cartridges per day for up to 6 months, cutting down during the last 3 months. Best effects are achieved by frequent puffing.

- One cartridge will last 20 minutes with continuous puffing and deliver 2 mg of absorbed nicotine. This is like smoking two cigarettes.
- The inhaler should be kept at temperatures higher than 40°F. In cold temperatures, it should be kept in an inside pocket or warm area.
- Do not eat or drink anything (especially coffee, soft drinks or juice) for 15 minutes before, or while using the inhaler.
- Side effects include mouth and throat irritation, coughing and runny nose.

If you use the maximum number of cartridges per day (16), the cost is about \$450 per month, or \$10.94 for 10 cartridges.

### NICOTINE NASAL SPRAY

Nicotine nasal spray is released from a pump bottle into the nose where the nicotine is rapidly absorbed through nasal membranes. With the spray, nicotine reaches the blood stream faster than other NRT products and can be most helpful for highly-addicted tobacco users.

A dose is two sprays – one in each nostril, best delivered with the head tilted slightly back. To avoid side effects, do not sniff, swallow or inhale while taking a dose.

- The maximum recommended dosage is five per hour, and no more than 40 per day.
- The most common side effects are nose and throat irritation. Sense of smell or taste may be affected for a short time as well.
- The spray should not be used by people with severe reactive airways disease (asthma).

The average cost of the spray is \$170 to \$300 per month, or \$5 to \$15 a day.

## Non-NRT Prescription Pills for Quitting

### BUPROPRION HYDROCHLORIDE (ZYBAN, WELLBUTRIN)

Bupropion, or Zyban, was approved by the Food & Drug Administration in 1997 to help smokers quit. The drug is also sold as an antidepressant under the name Wellbutrin. You begin taking Zyban while you are still smoking, one to two weeks before your quit date.

Take one pill every morning for 3 days, then one pill twice daily for 7 to 12 weeks.

- Zyban should not be used by anyone with a history of seizures, eating disorders or recent MAO inhibitor use.
- Side effects include dry mouth and difficulty sleeping.

The cost is approximately \$100 per month.

### VARENICLINE TARTRATE (CHANTIX)

Chantix works by reducing the pleasure of smoking by lessening withdrawal symptoms. Start Chantix one week before your quit date: One pill, once daily for 3 days; then twice daily for 12 weeks (as prescribed).

- Some smokers have reported that, while taking Chantix, cigarettes do not seem as satisfying as they once did.
- Side effects, which usually decrease over time, include nausea, headache, vomiting, gas, constipation, trouble sleeping, and vivid or unusual dreams.
- Women who are pregnant or breast-feeding should not take Chantix.
- Some patients have reported depressed mood, agitation, changes in behavior, suicidal thinking or behavior when attempting to quit smoking while taking Chantix. If you experience any of these symptoms, or if your family or caregiver observes these symptoms, please tell your doctor immediately. If you have ever had depression or other mental health problems, tell your doctor before taking Chantix.

The cost is approximately \$100 per month.

## A Final Note

Although not approved by the FDA, combining medications to quit tobacco use has been tried by some patients. They have combined passive NRT, such as the patch, with NRT that is used intermittently, such as gum, spray, lozenges or the inhaler. Others have tried to use a form of NRT combined with Bupropion. Chantix [now has a neuropsychiatric label], should never be used in combination with NRT, and has not been studied in combination with Bupropion. As always, you should check with your doctor before starting on any program to quit using tobacco.

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