Nicotine Replacement Therapy
and
Other Stop Smoking Medicines

Patient Information Leaflet

Adapted from: NHS Smokefree Factsheet produced by the Department of Health
Nicotine Replacement Therapy and Other Stop Smoking Medicines

Nicotine withdrawal Symptoms (and how to beat them)
Stopping smoking can be difficult. A recent survey found that smoking crossed smoker’s minds more than 8 times a day, in addition to the 15 times a day that they were having a cigarette ¹.

For smokers to give themselves the best possible chance of quitting for good, they need to get the best possible support to deal with their addiction.

Nicotine withdrawal symptoms are the cause of many relapses. These symptoms are caused by nicotine leaving the body, and can be different for everyone.

To quit successfully, you will need to learn new habits and coping strategies. Your body will go through some physical changes and, to avoid a period of “cold turkey”, nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) or other stop smoking medicines such as bupropion hydrochloride (Zyban®) or varenicline (Champix®) can help. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist can advise which products are the most suitable for you.

Figure 1: Official picture pack arnings
Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) at a glance

Some smokers are wary of using NRT products as they believe that nicotine itself can cause cancer. However, NRT is a method of giving your body nicotine without the harmful effects of smoking or chewing tobacco.

Taking a short course of NRT is much safer than staying a smoker, because unlike cigarettes NRT doesn't contain tar, carbon monoxide or poisons - the constituents of tobacco smoke which are most damaging to your health.

The basic idea is to gradually reduce the body's addiction by using a low and controlled nicotine dose to take the edge off the cravings and have a “soft landing”. It is, therefore, an effective way of helping you manage your withdrawal symptoms. Research shows that using NRT increases your chance of successfully quitting by 50 - 70%3. People who use the full 10 - 12 week course get the best results.

Nicotine at a glance

Nicotine is a highly addictive and fast acting drug. When a smoker inhales, nicotine gets into their bloodstream, affecting their brain 7 – 19 seconds later. It has many complex effects on the body, including increasing the heart rate and blood pressure and speeding up the metabolism – it can also affect mood and behaviour4.

However, nicotine itself is not carcinogenic; it is the tar and other toxins within a cigarette that can cause cancers and other serious diseases2. NRT products release a low dosage of nicotine over a sustained period and therefore help reduce nicotine cravings and withdrawal symptoms without these harmful elements4.
NRT products

There are a number of different NRT products available that differ in nominal dose and the method and speed of delivery of nicotine.

Nicotine patches work by giving you a constant supply of nicotine. You can get 16- and 24-hour patches. The 24-hour patch means you won’t get cravings and is useful if you usually get up for a cigarette during the night, but it can disturb your sleep. The 16-hour patch is ideal for most regular smokers. Move the patch site daily to avoid skin irritation.

The Inhalator is a plastic device shaped like a cigarette with a nicotine cartridge fitted into it. Sucking on the mouthpiece releases nicotine vapour, which gets absorbed through your mouth and throat. Inhalators are useful for people who miss the hand-to-mouth action of smoking.

The Mini Lozenge is useful to alleviate nicotine withdrawal cravings. It is available in two strengths – 1.5mg and 4mg. It is for oral use, and should be ‘parked’ between the cheek and the gum, the nicotine is absorbed through the lining of the mouth. Light smokers may find the 4mg lozenge too strong, and it may cause gastric upset, stinging of the mouth or hiccups. The lozenge should not be chewed or swallowed whole, and users should not eat or drink anything while a lozenge is in the mouth.

Other stop smoking medicines

Zyban® (bupropion hydrochloride) is a treatment which changes the way that your body responds to nicotine. You start taking Zyban® 1 to 2 weeks before you quit and treatment usually lasts for a couple of months to help you through the withdrawal cravings. It’s only available on prescription and is not available if you are pregnant.

Champix® (Varenicline) works by reducing your craving for a cigarette and by reducing the effects you feel if you do have a cigarette. You set a date to stop smoking, and start taking tablets 1 or 2 weeks before this date. Treatment normally lasts for 12 weeks. It’s only available on prescription and is not available if you are pregnant.
Your questions answered

Can I use NRT if I’m pregnant?
If you have found that you cannot quit smoking during your pregnancy, you might consider using NRT to help, if the health professional looking after you agrees. While previously the use of NRT was not recommended for pregnant or breastfeeding women, guidelines published in December 2005 by the Committee on Safety of Medicines recommended that this was changed due to the evidence that it is more harmful for mums-to-be and breastfeeding mums to continue smoking.\(^2\)

Can I use NRT if I’m a younger smoker?
In addition to the changes noted above with regard to pregnant and breastfeeding women, the same guidelines stated that there would be a removal of pack restrictions which previously recommended that 12 - 18 year olds should not use NRT. Again, the Committee on Safety of Medicines recommended this change due to the evidence that it is far more harmful for this group to continue smoking as opposed to using NRT.\(^2\)

Where can I obtain NRT?
You can get NRT on prescription from your doctor or via your local NHS Stop Smoking Service details of which can be found on [www.smokescape.org](http://www.smokescape.org) or telephone Bucks Smokefree Support Service on 0845 2707 222. NRT is also sold in shops and supermarkets and over the pharmacy counter. Follow the instructions on the package and speak to your doctor, practice nurse or pharmacist if you’re not sure.

Aren’t NRT products really expensive?
If you decide to purchase NRT products over the counter, this is much cheaper than continuing to smoke. At today’s rates, a 20-a-day smoker will spend almost £40,000 over the next 20 years.\(^5\) However, NRT is available at prescription cost through Bucks Smokefree Support Service. Smokers committed to stopping are twice as likely to succeed by using NRT compared with those using willpower alone.\(^3\)
How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the main entrance of the hospital and at every entrance to the clinical area or hospital. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser. Staff will let you know if this is the case.

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If you require a translation of this leaflet please call 01296 316042.

Sources

1 Online survey of 4,064 adults conducted by ICM Research in 2008. A total of 4,064 UK adults were interviewed between 23rd and 27th January 2008, of which 947 were current smokers.


5 Based on packet of 20 cigarettes costing £5.40.