

# MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



## Tobacco/Smoking Cessation Medications Overview

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the following medicines to help you quit smoking.

### Varenicline (Chantix™)

This is a different type of prescription medicine for quitting tobacco. It is a pill. Chantix acts at sites in the brain affected by nicotine. It works in two ways:

- Lessens withdrawal symptoms
- Blocks enjoyable effects of smoking

### Bupropion SR (Zyban®, Wellbutrin SR®)

This is a pill that can lessen your desire to smoke. Bupropion SR does not contain nicotine. It is a tablet that you take by mouth once or twice a day.

If you have felt sad or “blue” when cutting down or trying to quit tobacco in the past, Zyban may be helpful for you. The medicine in Zyban is also helpful for symptoms of depression.

### Nicotine Replacement Therapy

The following medicines are Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRTs). These medicines provide nicotine to your body in a different way than tobacco. You also get less nicotine with NRTs than from tobacco. Using an NRT when you quit can lessen cravings and withdrawal symptoms.

Follow these recommendations to receive the most benefit:

- Start taking an NRT before or on your Quit Day.
- Read and follow the package instructions to make sure you:
  - use the correct technique
  - use the correct dose for the amount you smoke

NRTs include nicotine patch, gum, lozenge, nasal spray and inhaler.

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## Nicotine Patch

A nicotine patch is placed onto your skin and releases nicotine into your bloodstream. It maintains an even level of nicotine in your system without tobacco. There are a number of nicotine patches available in different strengths and preparations. Some generic patches are available at a lower cost.

Some patches are meant to be worn overnight and others to be removed at bedtime. If you do not wear a patch overnight, your blood level of nicotine will be low in the morning. When you apply a new patch it takes some time for the nicotine to get into your system. If a morning cigarette is important to you, you may need a fast acting NRT, such as the nicotine lozenge when you awaken

## Nicotine Gum

As you chew nicotine gum, nicotine is released and absorbed by the blood vessels in your mouth. Do not chew this gum like regular gum. Slowly chew the piece of gum a few times until you feel a tingle. Then park it between your cheek and gum. One piece of gum lasts about 30 minutes. Use the nicotine gum on a schedule, such as one piece every one to two hours. Do not wait until you have a strong craving.

## Nicotine Lozenge

The nicotine lozenge is small and releases nicotine as it slowly dissolves. Do not chew or swallow it. Shift it around in your mouth when you feel a tingle. A lozenge lasts about 30 minutes.

## Nicotine Nasal Spray (prescription only)

The nicotine nasal spray delivers nicotine into your bloodstream very quickly. This helps to reduce the craving for a cigarette. The nicotine solution can irritate the lining of the nose and upper airways and cause sneezing. The sneezing lessens with use, but this medicine is not recommended for people with asthma, nasal or sinus problems.

## Nicotine Inhaler (prescription only)

The nicotine inhaler is a small device that you hold in your hand and inhale, similar to a cigarette. As you inhale from it, nicotine is quickly released into your blood stream. This is helpful for people who want to keep their hands busy.

## Combinations of Medicines

Some medicines can be combined for more relief. Some people do better by using a combination of nicotine replacement products, such as the nicotine patch with the nicotine lozenges or gum. Another effective combination for some is Bupropion and the nicotine patch.

Talk to your health care provider before your Quit Day to decide what is right for you. Studies show that the right combination of medicines can help your chances of quitting for good.

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