



Over the Counter Medications To Help You Stop Tobacco Use

Congratulations! Making the decision to stop smoking is the most important thing you can do to improve and protect your health, as well as the health of those around you. Trying to quit on your own, sometimes called “cold turkey”, may be difficult and uncomfortable. Quitting smoking is easier if you have the help and support you need. Sometimes medications can help you quit tobacco use. Using FDA (Food and Drug Administration) approved medications may make your quitting experience more comfortable. These medications can decrease your cravings and help you handle withdrawal symptoms.

What FDA-approved medications are available to help me quit?

There are different kinds of medications to help you quit. Three of these medications are available without a prescription, called over-the-counter (OTC) medication. For medications that require a prescription, see the ATS publication on Prescription Medication to Help You Stop Using Tobacco at <http://patients.thoracic.org/information-series/index.php>. OTC nicotine replacement products include; nicotine patches, nicotine gum and nicotine lozenges. These products are used for 8-12 weeks or longer, allowing you to slowly decrease the amount of nicotine you receive over time. By slowly decreasing the amount of nicotine you receive, your cravings for a cigarette or other tobacco product becomes less severe. Nicotine replacement products are FDA approved for use in people 18 years of age and older.

What should I know about nicotine replacement products?

Nicotine replacement products are providing you with the nicotine you would normally receive if you used tobacco. You should NOT smoke or use other tobacco products while you are using nicotine replacement products. Using tobacco products and nicotine replacement products together may give you very high doses of nicotine, which can make you nervous, cause abnormal dreams, difficulty sleeping, headache, heartburn, nausea, dry mouth, joint and muscle pain. You should seek medical help if any of the following develop, as they may be a sign of an allergic reaction or toxic nicotine levels: hives, breathing difficul-

ty, chest tightness, fast or irregular heartbeat, increase in your blood pressure, jaw, teeth or mouth problems or severe diarrhea.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, check with your health care provider before using these products. Keep all nicotine replacement products out of the reach of children.

Will the nicotine in these medications cause cancer?

It is important to know that nicotine does not cause cancer, but it is very addictive and the reason people continue to smoke. Using nicotine replacement products such as the patch, gum or lozenge will help you slowly wean off nicotine, while avoiding the 7,000 chemicals you are exposed to while smoking.

What is a nicotine patch?

The nicotine patch is a skin patch applied in the morning and worn all day. It should be applied anywhere above the waist, preferably on an area with little or no hair. Rotate the sites where you apply the patch to avoid skin irritation. Most people take the patch off one hour before bedtime to avoid difficulty with their sleep, such as nightmares and poor sleep. If the patch falls off, you must reapply a new one. Do not cut patches in half. The patch is a continuous transdermal (that means that the nicotine is absorbed through your skin) delivery system. Cutting the patch will change the amount of nicotine you get and you may not receive enough to keep you comfortable. The nicotine patch is available in 7, 14 and 21 mg doses. Consult your health care provider about the best dose for you.

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Over the Counter Medications To Help You Stop Tobacco Use (cont.)

What is nicotine gum?

Nicotine gum is nicotine available in a chewing gum. The proper use of nicotine gum is to chew it and “park it” between your cheek and gum. This allows the nicotine to be absorbed through your cheek and gums. Do not continually chew the gum and swallow the juice. Swallowing too much juice can cause hiccups, nausea and abdominal pain. Also don’t keep the gum in your mouth overnight, because you could choke, and it loses its potency after 30 minutes to an hour. The gum is available in 2mg and 4mg doses.

Nicotine lozenge

Moisten the nicotine lozenge and park it between your cheek and gum. Do not chew the lozenge. Lozenges lose their potency after 30 minutes to an hour. The lozenge is available in 2mg and 4mg doses.

Which nicotine replacement product is right for me?

Talk to your health care provider who can help you decide which products are best for you. Sometimes combining the nicotine replacement products (such as using the patch and the gum at the same time) can make you more comfortable and more successful in quitting—ask your health care provider if you can combine any of these products if one alone is not working for you.

ACTION STEPS:

- Do not continue smoking or tobacco use with nicotine replacement products.
- Speak with your health care provider or call the staff at the Quit Line to understand what dosage to take.
- Too much nicotine may cause you to be ill
- Remember, quitting smoking is your most important goal.
- Don’t give up! Keep trying to quit.

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Resources:

Fiore MC, Jaen CR, Baker TB, et al. *Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence: 2008 Update*. Clinical Practice Guideline. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Public Health Service. May 2008.

U.S. Food and Drug Administration. *FDA 101: Smoking Cessation Products*. January 2010. FDA (Food and Drug Administration) Consumer Health Information. <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm198176.htm>

Drugs.com. Nicotine side effects. <http://www.drugs.com/sfx/nicotine-side-effects.html>