

Treating Tobacco Dependence

Quitting cigarettes or other tobacco products can be hard to do. One reason is that nicotine in tobacco is habit-forming or addictive. If your body craves or “depends” on nicotine to feel “normal,” you are probably addicted to or dependent on nicotine.

Fortunately, the nicotine habit can be broken. The first step is to decide you will quit. A good next step is to talk with your physician. Counseling

and nicotine replacement products have proven effective in quitting smoking. Your physician can help determine the best treatment plan for you.

An article in the June 28, 2000, issue of *JAMA* describes the results of a major government report on the best treatments for tobacco dependence. One of the main recommendations is that the majority of smokers trying to quit should receive treatment.

NICOTINE WITHDRAWAL:

People trying to quit smoking complain of bad moods, intense cravings for smoking, difficulty concentrating, irritability, anxiety, restlessness, and difficulty sleeping – all effects of nicotine withdrawal.

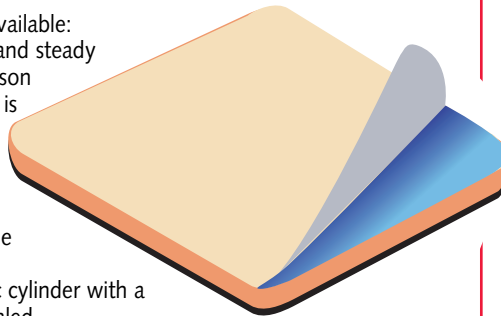
NICOTINE REPLACEMENT THERAPY:

Nicotine replacement therapy provides nicotine to the body to ease cravings for nicotine when a person is withdrawing from tobacco use. Nicotine replacement therapy helps a person deal with the physical withdrawal from nicotine by providing enough nicotine without the other harmful substances found in tobacco products. (Nicotine replacement therapy is generally used for smokers who smoke more than 10 cigarettes per day.)

Nicotine replacement therapy is used in place of tobacco products. You should never smoke or chew tobacco when using a nicotine replacement therapy. Nicotine is a powerful stimulant and too much can put you at risk for health complications.

Several forms of nicotine replacement are available:

- **Nicotine patch** – provides a controlled and steady supply of nicotine across the skin to a person trying to quit using tobacco; a new patch is applied each day.
- **Nicotine gum** – provides nicotine as needed (when a person is feeling the “urge”).
- **Nicotine nasal spray** – provides nicotine through a solution sprayed into the nose.
- **Nicotine inhaler** – the inhaler is a plastic cylinder with a cartridge that provides nicotine when inhaled.



If you have heart disease or blood vessel problems or are pregnant your doctor may be especially careful about giving you nicotine replacement therapy. You should follow all instructions your doctor gives you plus the instructions that are included with the type of nicotine replacement therapy that you use. Tell your doctor if you are experiencing any problems or “side effects” from the nicotine replacement therapy.

NON-NICOTINE MEDICATION:

Bupropion hydrochloride is a prescription medication that helps people who are quitting to deal with nicotine cravings. It can be used at the same time as nicotine replacement therapies.

If your doctor prescribes medication, you should let him or her know about any other prescription or non-prescription drugs or herbal supplements you are taking, so that you can avoid drug interactions.

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT:

- Individual or group counseling sessions help some people quit. Ask your doctor about these programs or call your local American Lung Association chapter or hospital to find programs in your community.
- Seek support from someone who has been successful at quitting.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Office on Smoking and Health
800/CDC-1311
or www.cdc.gov/tobacco
- American Cancer Society
800/ACS-2345 or www.cancer.org
- American Lung Association
800/LUNG-USA
or www.lungusa.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm. A previous *JAMA* Patient Page on quitting smoking was published on September 1, 1999.

Additional Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Cancer Society, American Lung Association, The AMA Family Medical Guide

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