

# Medications to help you quit smoking

---

## How can medication help me quit smoking?

Using medications can increase your chances of quitting smoking 2 to 3 times more than quitting without using medications.

One of the reasons quitting smoking is so hard is that tobacco products contain an addictive drug called nicotine. Medications help by reducing or getting rid of nicotine withdrawal symptoms while you learn to live as a non-smoker.

Nicotine withdrawal symptoms include:

- cravings for cigarettes or urges to smoke
- anger, irritability, frustration
- anxiety
- problems concentrating
- restlessness
- trouble sleeping, waking up at night
- depressed mood
- headache
- constipation
- increased cough

**Tobacco products include cigarettes, cigars, pipes or chewing tobacco. For the purpose of this handout the word cigarettes is used.**

---

This handout has information about the different types of medications to help you quit smoking. You can safely use these medications for as long as you need to use them to control your withdrawal symptoms.

You may find that using a combination of medications is the best approach. You and your health care provider can decide the medications that are right for you.

**We use the term health care provider in this handout. Your health care provider may be a doctor, nurse practitioner, tobacco cessation specialist, pharmacist or a member of a family health care team.**

## Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)

Medications that contain nicotine are called Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT). NRT delivers nicotine to the body without the dangerous chemicals found in cigarettes.

### What is the difference between the nicotine in NRT and in cigarettes?

Nicotine Replacement Therapy	Cigarettes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nicotine enters your body slowly making it less addictive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nicotine enters your body and reaches your brain in 7 to 10 seconds making it highly addictive.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nicotine by itself does not cause cancer, heart disease, stroke or blood clots.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 4000 chemicals in cigarettes can cause cancer, heart disease, stroke and blood clots.</li> </ul>

Another difference between NRT and cigarettes is that NRT does not produce second hand smoke. Second hand smoke causes many problems such as asthma and ear infections in children.

## Can I get too much nicotine from NRT?

It is rare to get too much nicotine from NRT. Symptoms of too much nicotine are:

- nausea, diarrhea and/or vomiting
- fast heart beat
- cold sweats
- dizziness
- headaches
- drooling

You could also get these symptoms if you smoke too many cigarettes at one time.

Work closely with your health care provider to find the best amount of each NRT to use to control your symptoms. You will learn the symptoms to look for and what to do if you take too much.

For example, if you have nausea, dizziness or a fast heart beat when chewing the nicotine gum, you will be advised to stop chewing, spit out and chew less the next time. Your health care provider should review your chewing technique as well. You will begin to learn the correct amount to safely chew for your body.

---

## What NRT products are available?

NRT is available at the pharmacy without a prescription as a:

- nicotine patch (Nicoderm<sup>®</sup>, Habitrol<sup>®</sup>, store brands)
- nicotine gum (Nicorette<sup>®</sup>, Thrive<sup>®</sup>, store brands)
- nicotine inhaler (Nicorette<sup>®</sup> Inhaler)
- nicotine lozenge (Nicorette<sup>®</sup>, Thrive<sup>®</sup>)
- nicotine mouth spray (Nicorette<sup>®</sup> Quickmist)

The nicotine patch gives you a slow steady amount of nicotine.

The nicotine gum, inhaler, lozenges and mouth spray can be used when you have nicotine cravings while wearing the patch.

Most people need more than one type of NRT when they quit smoking:

- one NRT to provide a steady supply of nicotine such as the patch,  
**and**
- another shorter acting NRT for cravings such as the gum.

You will need to practice using these products to find out which ones work the best for you.

---

## **Nicotine patch**

This medication replaces the nicotine you would get in cigarettes and other tobacco products.

The nicotine is slowly absorbed from the patch through your skin. The patch works for 24 hours.

### **How to take this medication:**

Take this medication as directed by your health care provider. The patch comes in different strengths.

You and your health care provider will work together to find the best strength for you. The amount you use depends on the amount of cigarettes you smoke.

---

**How to apply the patch:**

- Put the patch on a clean, dry, hair free area of your skin below your neck and above your waist.
- It is best to put it on after you shower or bathe.
- Do not cut the patch. You may fold it in half and apply tape to keep it in place.
- Do not use lotions or moisturizing soap.
- Touch only a small corner of the adhesive and make sure it sticks well to your skin.
- Wash your hands after applying the patch.
- Leave the patch on for 24 hours.
- After 24 hours, take off the patch.
- Safely throw out the patch. Make sure it is out of the reach of children or pets. There is enough nicotine left on the patch to make them very ill.
- Put a new patch on a different area of skin each day. This will help avoid itchy, red rashes.
- Some people get vivid dreams if they leave the patch on overnight. If this disturbs you, remove the patch at bedtime.

**Nicotine gum**

This medication replaces the nicotine you get in cigarettes and other tobacco products. The nicotine is absorbed through the inside of your mouth and cheeks.

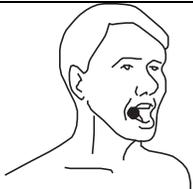
Use the gum when you have a tobacco craving.

The gum comes in different strengths and flavours. You and your health care provider can decide what strength to start with based on your withdrawal symptoms.

---

**How to take this medication:**

- Rinse your mouth. Avoid eating 15 minutes before using gum to get the best effect.
- Chew one piece at a time.
- The gum may stick to dentures and other dental appliances such as bridges or crowns. If it starts to stick to dentures, throw away safely. It may be easier to use the nicotine lozenges.
- If you have swallowing or chewing problems, then the gum may not be right for you.
- Chew the gum a few times then put it (park it) in your cheek. The gum tastes like pepper or your mouth may tingle. Remember the phrase “Chew, Chew, Park.”

<b>1</b>		Bite into the gum and chew once or twice.
<b>2</b>		Park it between your cheek and gum. Keep it there for about 1 minute.
<b>3</b>		Bite into the gum and chew once or twice again.
<b>4</b>		Park it between your cheek and gum. Keep it there for about 1 minute.
<b>5</b>		Repeat as needed. Each piece lasts about 30 minutes.

- When you chew too fast, you swallow more nicotine at one time. You may get an upset stomach. If this happens, chew less often or chew a lower dose of gum.
- If you swallow the gum the nicotine will upset your stomach.
- Do not drink liquids while the gum is in your mouth.
- Safely throw out the gum. Make sure it is out of the reach of children or pets. There is enough nicotine in the gum left to make them very ill.

**While taking this medication you may notice:**

- hiccups
- sore jaw and mouth from chewing

**Nicotine lozenges**

This medication replaces the nicotine you get in cigarettes and other tobacco products. The nicotine is absorbed through the inside of your mouth and cheeks.

Use the lozenges when you have a cigarette craving. The lozenges come in different strengths and flavours. You and your health care provider can decide what strength to start with based on your withdrawal symptoms.

**How to take this medication:**

- Rinse your mouth. Avoid eating 15 minutes before using a lozenge to get the best effect.
  - Do not chew the lozenge, as the nicotine will upset your stomach. Suck on it until you notice a strong taste. Then park it between your gum and cheek.
  - Wait one minute or until the taste fades.
  - Repeat sucking and parking until as long as needed.
  - Each lozenge lasts about 30 minutes.
  - Lozenges do not stick to dentures or other dental appliances.
  - If you have swallowing problems, a lozenge may not be right for you.
  - Safely throw out unused portions of any lozenge. Make sure it is out of the reach of children or pets. There is enough nicotine left to make them very ill.
-

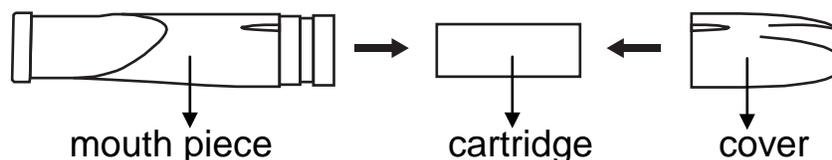
## Nicotine inhaler (Nicorette inhaler)

This medication replaces the nicotine you get in cigarettes and other tobacco products. The nicotine inhaler is a plastic mouthpiece that you puff. You put a cartridge that contains nicotine into the mouthpiece and puff. The nicotine is absorbed through your cheeks and the back of your throat. It does not go into your lungs.

The inhaler is used when you have a cigarette craving.

### How to take this medication:

- Rinse your mouth. Avoid eating 15 minutes before using the inhaler to get the best effect.



- Put the inhaler together as described on the package.
- Puff on the inhaler when you have a craving for a cigarette. The nicotine inhaler works very quickly.
- You may puff on the inhaler as often as you need and use as many cartridges as you need to in a day. Each cartridge lasts about 80 to 400 puffs (or 20 minutes of continuous puffing).
- Replace the cartridge when you no longer taste the puff or feel the tingling that you may have when you puff.
- Clean your mouth piece on a regular basis with soap and water.
- Safely throw out the cartridge. Make sure it is out of the reach of children or pets. There is enough nicotine left in the used cartridge to make them very ill.

### While taking this medication you may notice:

- coughing caused by puffing deeply on the cartridge

## Nicotine mouth spray

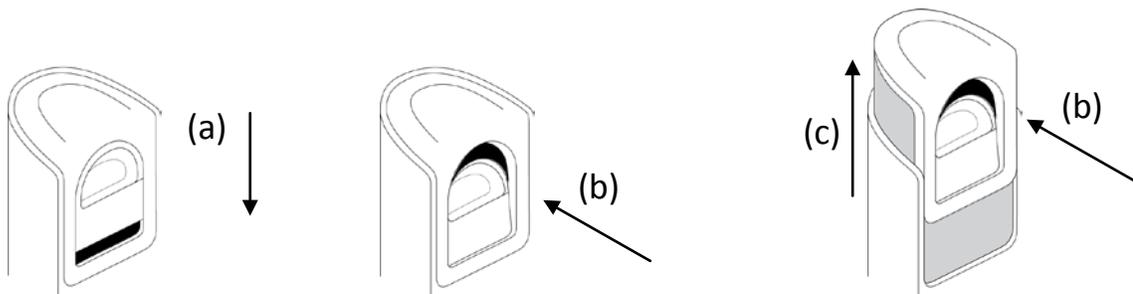
This medication replaces the nicotine you would get in cigarettes and other tobacco products.

The nicotine spray is used when you have a cigarette craving. Use 1 to 2 sprays when you would normally smoke a cigarette or have cravings to smoke.

### How to take this medication:

1. To open the spray – use your thumb to slide down the button (a) until it can be pushed lightly inwards (b).

While pushing in, slide upwards (c) to unlock the top of the dispenser. Then release the button.

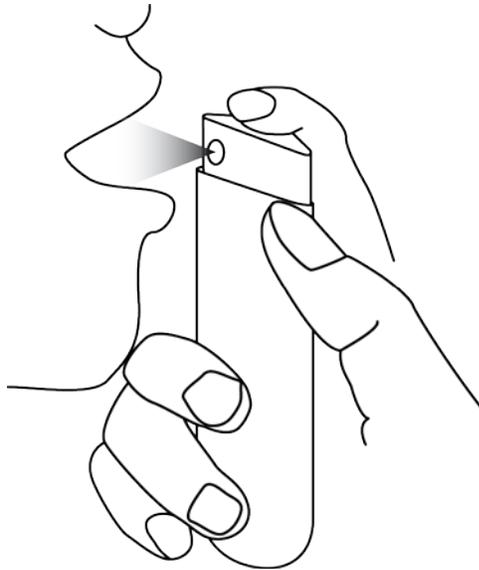


2. To prime the pump – before using the spray for the first time, load the spray pump by pressing the top of the dispenser several times until a fine mist appears. Make sure you point the spray away from yourself, other people, children or pets.

If your spray is not used for more than a couple of days, you need to repeat this step.

3. To use the spray – point the spray towards your open mouth and hold it as close to your mouth as possible, avoiding your lips.

Press the top of the dispenser to release one spray into your mouth. Do not inhale spray to prevent getting it down your throat. For best results, do not swallow for a few seconds after spraying.



4. To close the spray – slide the slide button down until it can be pushed lightly inwards. While pushing in, slide the top of the dispenser down to lock.

## What prescription medications are available?

There are other medications available only with a prescription that do not contain nicotine and also work well to help you quit smoking

### **Bupropion (Zyban<sup>®</sup>, Bupropion SR<sup>®</sup>)**

This medication acts like nicotine in the brain and lessens withdrawal symptoms. You begin taking this medication 1 to 2 weeks before the quit date that you have picked. You can use bupropion by itself or with NRT. Some people find it helpful to wear a nicotine patch on their quit date.

Before starting this medication tell your health care provider if you have a history of seizures, eating disorders or have recently quit excessive drinking of alcohol. You may not be able to use this medication. You and your health care provider can decide on what medication to take instead.

#### **How to take this medication:**

- Take this medication as directed by your health care provider.

#### **While taking this medication you may notice:**

- dry mouth
- vivid dreams
- nervousness
- restless
- trouble sleeping

Do not take this medication after 6:00 p.m. at night to avoid having trouble sleeping.

This medication may also help control weight and improve mood.

---

## **Varenicline (Champix<sup>®</sup>)**

This medication works by taking the place of nicotine in the brain. This helps to reduce your cravings for cigarettes. So after a while you feel ready to quit. If you have a cigarette, you may ask yourself, “Why did I have that? It didn’t do anything for me”. The “kick” from the cigarette will be gone.

You begin taking this medication 1 to 2 weeks before the quit date that you have picked. Since it is a prescription medication, you and your health care provider will find the amount that is best for you. You need to take Champix<sup>®</sup> for a minimum of 12 weeks. Some people need to use it longer.

### **How to take this medication:**

- Take this medication as directed by your health care provider.
- Tell your health care provider if you have kidney problems or are on dialysis.

### **When you take this medication you may notice:**

- stomach upset, nausea
- vivid dreams

To avoid an upset stomach, take this medication with food and at least 250 ml (8 ounces) of water.

Talk to your health care provider if you do not like having vivid dreams or if you experience mood changes which are unusual for you while on varenicline.

## What about electronic cigarettes?

Electronic cigarettes are devices that resemble regular cigarettes. They usually have a battery, an atomizer (heating element) and a cartridge that contains a liquid that is vapourized and inhaled. They may or may not contain nicotine.

There is not enough evidence to say whether electronic cigarettes are safe or effective to help smokers quit or cut down on smoking. They are not regulated by Health Canada.

Concerns about electronic cigarettes:

- Some tests have shown toxins released in the vapour that are harmful or can cause cancer.
- There have been reports of the battery overheating and exploding.
- Some electronic cigarettes labeled as nicotine free have been found to contain nicotine.
- The liquid nicotine contained in the cartridges can be lethal in very small amounts to children and animals.
- Many places have restricted their use in public places.

## What about other medications that I take?

When you quit smoking, your body begins to heal and this may affect other medications that you take. Some medications may need to have their doses changed. This includes blood thinners, mood disorder and diabetes medications.

You may also find the amount of caffeine you usually drink causes you to be jittery when you quit smoking. Drinking fewer beverages that have caffeine such as coffee, tea or cola before you quit smoking can help prevent this.

Discuss your plans to quit smoking with your health care provider and pharmacist.

---

## Will quitting smoking affect my mood?

You are at increased risk of depression no matter what method you use to quit smoking. This can happen whether or not you have a history of depression, mental illness or suicide. Talk to your health care provider if you start feeling unusually sad while you are trying to quit or after quitting.

### Remember...

- **Quitting smoking is a process - not a one-time event.**
- **It takes practice to learn how to be a non-smoker.**
- **Learn from your past and do not give up. You will quit smoking as long as you do not quit trying.**

## Where can I get help to quit smoking?

There are excellent programs in the Niagara to Halton area to help you quit smoking (see below).

The programs offer help with a trained quit smoking coach and may give free nicotine replacement products such as nicotine patches, lozenges and/or inhalers.

### Smokers' Helpline

The Smoker's Helpline is a free, confidential service and is available in over 100 languages. Talk with a trained quit smoking coach about:

- making a quit plan
- coping with cravings
- quitting methods
- withdrawal symptoms
- managing stress
- dealing with slips and relapses
- strategies to help you reach your goal
- programs and resources close to where you live

Call toll free at 1-877-513-5333

Get online support at [www.smokershelpline.ca](http://www.smokershelpline.ca). Special features include:

- support groups
- "Quit Meter"
- inspirational email
- text messaging

### **Ontario Drug Benefit**

The Ontario Drug Benefits provides free Champix or Bupropion to all Ontario Drug Benefit recipients. Your doctor, nurse practitioner or pharmacist can prescribe these medications for you.

### **Family Health Teams**

Many family health teams provide programs and free nicotine replacement products for their patients. Ask your doctor or health care provider.

## **Other programs**

- Tobacco Addiction Recovery Program (TARP) run by St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton. This program offers education, weekly group sessions and free nicotine replacement products. This is an excellent program if you are dealing with mental illness of any sort such as depression. Contact them at 905-522-1155, ext. 36407.
- Breather Easier located in Hamilton and run by the Good Shepherd. Contact them at 905-528-3655.
- Hamilton Public Health Tobacco Hotline provides education and a five-week course of free nicotine patches at their STOP program. Call 905-540-5566, ext. 1 to register.
- Halton Regional Stop Smoking Clinic provides counselling and free nicotine replacement products in Burlington, Oakville, Milton and Acton. Contact them at 905-825-6000, ext. 7887 or toll free at 1-866-442-5866.
- Aboriginal Tobacco Program works with many groups across Ontario. Call 416-971-9800, ext. 3782 or [www.tobaccowise.com](http://www.tobaccowise.com)
- Niagara/St. Catharines – free “Not so Hot” quit smoking program which includes booklet, lip balm, breath spray and tangle toy. May be ordered online at [www.niagararegion.ca/living/health\\_wellness/smoking/notsohot](http://www.niagararegion.ca/living/health_wellness/smoking/notsohot)
- Brantford Quit Smoking Clinic offers counselling and free nicotine replacement products) for eligible people. Call 519-753-4937, ext. 455.