

Tobacco Cessation Medications

The right choice for you?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has currently approved seven medications to help you quit using tobacco products:

- Varenicline – available by prescription
- Bupropion SR – available by prescription
- Nicotine gum – available over-the-counter
- Nicotine inhaler – available by prescription
- Nicotine nasal spray – available by prescription
- Nicotine patch – available by prescription and over-the counter
- Nicotine lozenges - available over-the-counter.^{1,2}

Varenicline (brand name Chantix) is a non-nicotine medication intended to help smokers quit in two ways – by blocking some of the rewarding effects of nicotine (the addictive drug in tobacco products) and at the same time tackling the withdrawal most people feel after they quit. **Note:** The FDA and manufacturer on January 17, 2008, added a warning for healthcare providers to use caution prescribing Chantix for patients with pre-existing psychiatric conditions and to monitor all patients using Chantix for psychological symptoms.²

Bupropion (brand names Zyban and Wellbutrin) is a non-nicotine medication that helps reduce cravings and can relieve symptoms of depression for some people.^{1,3} **Note:** On May 2, 2007, the FDA proposed new warnings about suicidal thinking and behavior with the use of antidepressants.⁴ Be sure to discuss potential side effects and risks with your doctor before starting any medication. See the medication guides for [Chantix](#) and [Zyban](#) for more information.

The other medications listed above are known as **nicotine replacement therapy** (NRT) products because they deliver small, safe amounts of nicotine to the body to try to help you with nicotine cravings and through nicotine withdrawal symptoms (e.g., irritability, difficulty concentrating, feelings of depression, difficulty sleeping, increased appetite

cravings, headaches, etc.).⁵ The most effective time to start nicotine replacement therapy is at the beginning of an attempt to quit.² So, if you and your doctor find NRT is right for you, get

prepared by getting your medication and keeping it on hand for your quit date through the appropriate length of treatment (see below for more information).

Talk with your health care provider (doctor, dentist, or pharmacist). If you are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant, you should not use nicotine replacement medications. If you have heart disease or other circulatory disease, eating disorder, or are a heavy drinker, these medications may or may not be safe for you depending on your individual circumstances—talk with your doctor.

If medication is an appropriate choice...

- Your provider may recommend one or some combination of these medications as part of your quit tobacco plan. He/she will make recommendations based on your individual needs, which may differ according to how much and what type(s) of tobacco you use.
- It is crucial that you use these medications correctly. Read the instructions, and talk with your health care provider. Start out using enough medicine. Use the full dosage suggested in the instructions or by your doctor. Don't skip or forget to use your nicotine replacement medication(s) after you first quit tobacco.⁶



- Use the medication for an appropriate length of time. Often, it will be recommended that you continue to use the medication for a designated length of time (e.g., 8–12 weeks)⁷ even if you think you don't need it anymore. Be patient, and stick with it. If you slip and use tobacco, don't stop using your medication unless advised by your doctor to do so.



- Wait at least ½ hour after using the gum, lozenge, or inhaler before eating or drinking anything acidic. Acidic food items (e.g., tomatoes and tomato sauces, oranges, lemons, grapefruit, orange juice, grapefruit juice, coffee, soda, etc.) can keep these nicotine products from working.⁶
- Gradually taper off the medication. Don't stop completely until you are ready. You can set up a plan with your health care provider. Keep some of the medication with you after you stop using it. This backup package may help you be ready for an emergency situation.
- **DO NOT** use nicotine replacement products if you plan to continue to smoke or use other tobacco products. The combined dose of nicotine could be dangerous to your health. Having a slip where you smoke one or two cigarettes is not dangerous (don't quit using your medication if this happens), but continuing your old patterns of tobacco use with these medications could be dangerous.⁸

Remember, there is no single pill to cure smoking,³ but these medications may very well increase your chances for quitting tobacco.

Note: For ideas on how to save money on your medications, see the *HealthHints* issue, [Saving Money on Medication](#).

Sources:

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