



The United States Public Health Service guidelines for quitting smoking recommend a combination of counseling and medication. The following medications are approved by the FDA for smoking cessation. While there is no one “best” treatment, these medications can increase a patient’s chances of quitting two- or three-fold.

Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)

- **Patch:** Nicotine patches are designed to provide a steady dose of nicotine through the skin over a designated period of time (16-24 hours). The patch is available via prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) and is designed to provide enough nicotine to reduce cravings. Treatment is recommended for 6-8 weeks.
- **Gum:** The nicotine gum is available over-the-counter and is recommended for smokers who want something to turn to when experiencing the urge to smoke. Chew up to 20-30 pieces of gum a day for 6-8 weeks. For individuals smoking more than 25 cigarettes per day, the 4mg gum is recommended while those smoking less should be prescribed the 2mg product.
- **Lozenge:** The lozenge is an OTC medication that is typically used for 8-12 weeks. The 4mg dose is recommended for individuals who smoke within 30 minutes of awakening; otherwise the 2mg dose is used. Patients are urged to use at least 6-12 lozenges per day.
- **Inhaler:** Patients “puff” small doses of nicotine through this prescription product that looks similar to a cigarette. Unlike a cigarette, the inhaler does not contain any harmful carbon monoxide. Treatment usually lasts 8-12 weeks, depending on the patient.
- **Nasal Spray:** The nasal spray is available by prescription. Patients spray nicotine into their nose to help decrease withdrawal symptoms. Recommended use is up to 2 sprays per hour for no longer than 3 months.

Bupropion

Bupropion SR is a prescription medication marketed under the brand name Zyban (available in generic form too). The medication is designed to help reduce cravings for nicotine. Bupropion can also relieve symptoms of depression for some patients. This pill is not recommended for patients currently using monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitors, other forms of bupropion, or for individuals with a history of seizures or eating disorders. Treatment is recommended for 7-12 weeks and patients begin taking the medication 1-2 weeks prior to their quit date.

Varenicline (Chantix)

Varenicline is a prescription medication that was approved by the FDA in May 2007 as a smoking cessation aid. This medication works differently than other cessation medications in that it is intended to block some of the rewarding effects of nicotine while also minimizing withdrawal symptoms. In research studies, varenicline was shown to be well-tolerated, with overall discontinuation rates similar to a placebo. The most common side effects are nausea, headache, insomnia, and abnormal dreams. The FDA and manufacturer added a warning for healthcare providers to monitor patients for serious psychological symptoms. Treatment is recommended for 12 weeks and patients begin taking the medication 1 week prior to quitting.

