

# Why Is Quitting So Hard?

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In 2003, 21.6% of Americans were smokers, and 70% of them wanted to quit. Quitting—and sticking with it—can be a huge physical, social, and emotional challenge.

An addiction to nicotine is more powerful than an addiction to heroin or cocaine. When you inhale nicotine through tobacco products, the nicotine reaches your brain almost instantly to produce a feeling of reward. Over time, your body craves more nicotine and becomes dependent on it.

When your body does not get nicotine, if you are dependent on it, you may have withdrawal symptoms. You may feel irritable or angry, have a headache, or be unable to concentrate.

Smokers also rely on the routine of smoking—for example, in the car on the way to work, or with friends at break time, or after dinner. Quitting is thus a very tough challenge for smokers.

## What Medications Can Help Me Quit?

Some smoking-cessation medications contain nicotine.

These medications help to lessen withdrawal symptoms by slowly lowering the nicotine levels in the body. They let the smoker focus on breaking the social habits of nicotine without battling the withdrawal symptoms at the same time.

Medications that do not contain nicotine also are available with a prescription. One medication (bupropion) is contained in the products called Wellbutrin and Zyban, and it works to calm the cravings of smoking. Nicotine medication and these products can be used together. In fact, the combination is both common and successful. Another prescription medication that is now available and that does not contain nicotine is called Chantix.

Choosing the right medication can be difficult, but medications can make it easier to quit and to stay quit (see the Table). Talk to your doctor if you have more questions about medications.

## How Can I Develop a Quit Plan?

Although medications can help you quit, they are only part of the overall process. Here are a few steps to prepare you to become and stay smoke-free:

- Choose a quit date—and stick to it
- Find people who will help you quit
- Be prepared. Think ahead about the challenges you may come across—for example, wanting to light up

**Table. Examples of Medications to Aid Smoking Cessation**

Product	Patch	Gum	Lozenge	Nasal Spray	Inhaler	Zyban	Chantix
Does it contain nicotine?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
How does it work?	It slowly releases nicotine into the skin.	It releases nicotine into the mouth.	It releases nicotine into the mouth.	It sprays nicotine into the nose.	It puffs nicotine into the mouth and throat.	It works in the body to decrease nicotine cravings.	It activates nicotine receptors in the brain and blocks nicotine from attaching to them.
Does it need a prescription?	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
How do I use it?	Apply 1 patch to a non-hairy area each morning.	Chew it until a minty or peppery taste is released, then “park” it between your cheek and gum.	Suck 1 lozenge until it is completely dissolved.	Use 1 spray in each nostril once or twice an hr.	Use 1 cartridge until it is empty.	Take it as prescribed. Begin taking it 2 wk before your quit day.	Take it as prescribed. Begin taking it 1 wk before your quit day.

## A Patient Handout from Your Pharmacist

**Table. Examples of Medications to Aid Smoking Cessation (continued)**


Product	Patch	Gum	Lozenge	Nasal Spray	Inhaler	Zyban	Chantix
Can I still smoke while I use it?	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
What side effects might occur?	Skin irritation, trouble sleeping, vivid dreams, upset stomach	Mouth soreness, hiccups, upset stomach	Insomnia, nausea, heartburn	Irritation inside the nose, stuffy nose, changes in taste and smell	Coughing, runny nose, irritation of the mouth and throat	Trouble sleeping, dry mouth	Nausea, trouble sleeping, changes in dreams, constipation, gas, vomiting
How long can I use it?	8 wk	12 wk	12 wk	3-6 mo	6 mo	12 wk; may continue up to 6 mo if needed	12 wk; if successful, an additional 12 wk is recommended.
Who should <i>not</i> use this medicine?				People with asthma or wheezing	People who have had seizures, an eating disorder, or alcohol abuse or have taken another bupropion medication or a certain kind of medication for depression		People under age 18
I should check with my doctor first if...	I am pregnant or breastfeeding or have had heart disease.	I am pregnant or breastfeeding or have had heart disease.	I am pregnant or breastfeeding or have had heart disease.	I am pregnant or breastfeeding or have had heart disease.	I am pregnant or breastfeeding or have had heart disease.	I am pregnant or breastfeeding.	I am pregnant or breastfeeding or have kidney problems or get kidney dialysis.

with your morning cup of coffee, or having to turn down a cigarette from a friend who smokes.

- Understand your medications. Know how and when to use them and what to expect from each of them.
- Have self-help materials available. Great resources and links are available at [www.cdc.gov/tobacco/how2quit.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/how2quit.htm).
- Get information on available programs and services. Check out the National Network of Tobacco Cessation Quitlines at 800-QUIT-NOW.
- Keep busy. Distract yourself by exercising, drinking water, or chewing gum.
- Avoid temptation. Establish a new routine to help you avoid old habits.
- Understand “slips.” Smoking 1 or 2 cigarettes is *not* a relapse—just a slip. Knowing what caused the slip will help you prevent it in the future.

### Other Resources for Help

Many pharmacies, health care offices, and Veterans Affairs or Indian Health Service facilities have established smoking-cessation clinics. If you participate in one of these clinics, you will have regular appointments with a pharmacist or another health care provider who is certified in tobacco-cessation counseling. You and the health care provider together will establish and maintain a Quit Plan, discuss and monitor your medications, and work toward helping you become and stay smoke-free. Check on what local community programs are available for you.

*Dr. Holmberg would like to thank Megan Wohr, RPh, NCPS. Ms. Wohr is a pharmacist at Phoenix Indian Medical Center in Phoenix, Ariz, where she has a pharmacy-based tobacco-cessation clinic. She was a great help in writing this article.* 

*This handout for patients will be available online at [www.pharmacytimes.com](http://www.pharmacytimes.com).*