

## Champix Information

February 2011

Champix (Varenicline) became available to the public in Australia through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008. It is only available on prescription from general practitioners.

Medical questions about the drug can be referred back to the prescribing doctor, the National Prescribing Service (1300 888 763) or Pfizer's product information line (1800 675 229).

### What does it do?

It reduces craving and the negative effects of withdrawal and therefore, the reinforcing effects of smoking. Champix works by activating certain receptors in the brain and blocking the attachment of nicotine to these receptors. This helps to satisfy the part of the brain that craves nicotine.

### How much does it cost?

The initial prescription is for a 4 week course of tablets after which patients need to return to their GP for a second prescription for the remaining 8 weeks of treatment. The cost per prescription is subsidised by the Australian Government through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Each prescription costs around \$5.40 for holders of a (Centrelink) Health Care Card, otherwise the cost is around \$33.30 for other patients.

### Recommendations for those planning to use Champix:

Champix is a useful aid in treating nicotine addiction, but motivation to quit smoking is still the most important ingredient for success. Accessing additional support or counselling increases the chances of quitting with Champix.

A course of Champix treatment is 12 weeks and requires 2 prescriptions, the first for an initial 4 weeks of treatment (gradually increasing dose up to full strength) and the second prescription for a further 2 months of treatment.

It is recommended the treatment be used for the full period of 12 weeks. An additional course of 12 weeks of treatment may be considered for patients, and research supports the benefits of extended treatment for some people.

Since February 1 2011, Champix is available for an additional 12-weeks of subsidised therapy per year, taking the maximum subsidised course to 24-weeks per year. Patients will need to return to their doctor to get their second 12-week course of treatment.

The period between starting a course of Champix and a course of Zyban (another prescription medication for smoking cessation) must be at least 6 months.

### Adverse effects:

- Nausea (usually mild): To reduce nausea, take with a full glass of water and with some food
- Headache
- Insomnia
- Abnormal dreams

### Other important recommendations and information

1. It is not recommended in pregnancy or for lactating women.
2. It is not recommended for under 18 year olds.
3. If people have kidney problems, fits or convulsions, use insulin, asthma medications, blood thinners or have a history of mental illness **discuss the use of Champix with your doctor.**
4. There have been some reports of Champix affecting mood and behaviour; this includes depression and thoughts of self harm or harming others. That is why it is important for people to tell the doctor if there is a history of mental illness before starting to take Champix.
5. It is important to use caution when driving and operating machinery until an individual knows how quitting and/or Champix may affect them.

**For all medical questions speak to your doctor.**

## Treatment

Commence treatment 1-2 weeks prior to quit date, tablets to be swallowed whole or with water, with or without food.

<b>Days 1 – 3:</b>	0.5 mg once daily	White tablet
<b>Days 4 – 7:</b>	0.5 mg twice daily	White tablet
<b>Day 8 – to end of treatment (12 weeks)</b>	1 mg twice daily	Blue tablet

## Summary

- **Varenicline (CHAMPIX) is a non-nicotine drug for smoking cessation. It has a different mechanism of action to that of other smoking-cessation drugs.**
- **In clinical trials of generally healthy, motivated smokers, more people using Varenicline (23%) had quit smoking at 1 year compared with those using Bupropion (ZYBAN) or placebo (15% and 10%, respectively). Varenicline should only be prescribed in conjunction with a comprehensive smoking-cessation support and counselling program.**
- **Nausea was the most common adverse effect of Varenicline in clinical trials (around 30%) leading to treatment withdrawal in around 3% of people. Other common adverse effects included insomnia, abnormal dreams, headache and constipation.**
- **The safety and efficacy of Varenicline in smokers with serious medical or psychiatric illness has not been established.**
- **Monitor all patients for behaviour and/or mood changes, because of post-marketing reports of psychiatric symptoms associated with Varenicline use.**
- **The effectiveness of Varenicline on long-term abstinence rates beyond 12 months has not been studied.**
- **Varenicline is subsidised on the PBS for one 12-week course of treatment per patient per year. A second course is available should a doctor deem this necessary.**
- **The safety and efficacy of Varenicline in combination with Bupropion (Zyban) and other pharmacological therapies for smoking cessation has not been established.**

Additional information about Champix can be obtained online at [www.pfizeraustralia.com.au](http://www.pfizeraustralia.com.au) under the categories of products