



Information Sheet

202 Greenhill Road Eastwood SA 5063
PO Box 929 Unley 5061
Phone +61 8 8291 4141
Fax +61 8 8291 4194
www.quitsa.org.au

Products to help you quit

Stopping smoking is a positive step. But some people may find using some sort of medication helpful, particularly if they've tried to quit before and found it difficult. There are two types of products that can help, those that contain nicotine and those that don't.

Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) products help smokers quit by replacing some of the nicotine they normally get from their cigarettes. All forms of NRT are available over the counter, however, you should only use it as directed by the **Consumer Medicine Information** that the manufacturer provides in each packet. You cannot assume that because a product is suitable and safe for your use that the same applies to others - in some cases (eg children) it may be harmful.

Zyban and Champix are non-nicotine medications that can help you quit smoking by blocking certain 'triggers' in the brain. These are **only available with a prescription from your doctor**. Before your doctor can prescribe you either medication, they will need to know some important patient information to determine whether the medication is suitable for you.

Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)

There are now five types of NRT (nicotine replacement therapy) available in Australia - **patches, gum, lozenges, sublingual tablet and inhaler**. These help smokers quit by replacing some of the nicotine they normally get from their cigarettes with nicotine absorbed through the skin and the lining of the mouth. This eases some of the nicotine withdrawal symptoms such as cravings and irritability. NRT can help smokers who want to quit deal more effectively with their nicotine addiction while they get used to a non-smoking lifestyle.

Smoking can be thought of as an addiction with three basic parts

- addiction to nicotine
- reinforcing behaviours
- psychological dependence

Many people are addicted in all three ways, but some are not. Using NRT only addresses the physical addiction to nicotine. Because of this, most people need help such as counselling to change the psychological and behavioural patterns associated with smoking as well.

Nicotine entering the body through NRT is absorbed at a lower rate and in lower doses, and most importantly, without the other toxins contained in cigarettes, such as carbon monoxide and other cancer-causing substances.

Who will get the most out of NRT?

Research suggests that those who are most likely to benefit from the use of NRT in any of its forms will

- currently smoke 15 or more cigarettes a day
- be receiving other forms of support (eg. information, counselling, follow-up, being part of a quit program).

When using NRT, you should not smoke at all.

How effective is NRT?

Research suggests that NRT increases the chances of people successfully quitting. When people are highly motivated to stop smoking, and use NRT to help them, they are twice as likely to stop smoking, and stay stopped, than those who use nothing.

How can I get NRT?

All forms of NRT are available over the counter at pharmacies and some retail outlets (eg. supermarkets), but you should discuss with your pharmacist which type will be most suitable for you. Some forms are available in different strengths - eg lozenges, sublingual tablet and gum. You should discuss this too. As a rough guide, if you have your first cigarette within 30 minutes of waking and smoke more than 20 cigarettes a day, you may need the strongest form.

Is NRT suitable for everyone?

You should **not** use NRT if you

- are a non-smoker, or only smoke occasionally
- are under 18
- have had a recent heart attack or stroke

If you are **pregnant or breastfeeding** it is strongly recommended you check with your doctor or pharmacist before using NRT as some forms of NRT are more suitable than others.

You should also consult your pharmacist or doctor if you have a number of common medical conditions, including asthma, heart disease (including angina or palpitations), high blood pressure and diabetes. Some medications, both prescribed and over the counter medication, may interact with NRT, so be sure to mention anything you are currently taking to your doctor or pharmacist.

Inside each pack of NRT product is important Consumer Medicine Information. **Be sure to read this information very carefully before starting to use NRT.**

Cost

Currently in Australia, three major brands of NRT are available - Nicorette, Nicobate and QuitX. Other generic brands may also be available. These are competing brands of similar products manufactured by different pharmaceutical companies. Prices of all types of NRT vary between brands, and may vary considerably between pharmacies - it pays to shop around.

Some pharmacies offer discount to members and some health funds provide a rebate, depending on the type of cover. It may be also be worth investigating mail order. As a rough guide, lozenges cost from \$5 per day, gum from \$6 per day, inhaler from \$6 per day, and patches around \$25-\$40 per week, if used according to the manufacturer's directions.

Non-nicotine medications – Zyban & Champix

There are currently two non-nicotine products available that are recognised as aids for smoking cessation and are listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS); Bupropion Hydrochloride (**Zyban**) and Varenicline Tartrate (**Champix**). Both forms of medication are only available with a doctor's prescription. The PBS only allows for one prescription of each medication per year. Any further medications needed within the year will be at full cost to the patient.

How Zyban works

Zyban comes in tablet form and does not contain nicotine. It acts on the parts of the brain that are affected by nicotine. It seems to reduce craving and withdrawal symptoms such as frustration and anxiety, difficulty concentrating, restlessness and negative mood.

Smokers start taking Zyban before their quit date, usually stopping around day 8, and will need to use it for at least 9 weeks. Zyban is prescribed as an initial dose of 30 tablets, with a follow-up prescription of 90 tablets. This enables your GP to check on your progress and any possible side effects.

Who cannot take Zyban?

Zyban is only available on prescription from your doctor. Some people should **not** take it, including people who

- have ever had seizures
- have had head injuries
- take some anti-depressants (MAO inhibitors)
- take other medication containing bupropion
- have, or have had, eating disorders.

It is very important to discuss thoroughly and completely with your doctor, your suitability to use Zyban. As with many other medications, if you fail to tell the prescribing doctor about all your conditions, and all medications you are taking, you place yourself at risk of adverse reactions to the drug.

Zyban must be taken according to prescription instructions.

It is very important to read the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) provided in the pack before starting to take this medication.

Side effects

Quite a number of people report side effects or allergic reactions when using Zyban. Some of these are quite serious. Possible side effects include dry mouth, difficulty sleeping, headache, upset stomach and sometimes seizures. See your doctor immediately if you are at all concerned.

How Champix works

Champix is a tablet form of medication that works by stimulating receptors for nicotine in the brain. This produces an effect that relieves the craving and withdrawal symptoms you can get when you stop smoking. At the same time, Champix blocks nicotine from acting on these receptors. This prevents any nicotine inhaled in tobacco smoke from having a rewarding and enjoyable effect.

Champix comes in the form of white and light blue tablets that you take with water regularly at the same time each day. You start taking Champix 1-2 weeks before your quit date. During this time you take a white tablet (0.5 mg) which is a low dose to help your body adjust to the medication, and from week 2 onwards you start taking the light blue tablets (1 mg) twice daily.

You will normally need to take Champix for 12 weeks, however, your doctor may advise you to take Champix for a further 12 weeks after your first treatment. This is to increase your chances of quitting smoking in the long term.

Who cannot take Champix

You should not take Champix if you:

- Are allergic to any of the ingredients that Champix contains;
- Are under 18 years of age; or
- Are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding.

Before you are prescribed Champix by your doctor, you must tell them if you:

- Have allergies to any other medicines, foods, etc;
- Have had kidney problems, haemodialysis treatment or repeated fits or convulsions; or
- Have a history of mental illness.

Side effects

Of the below side effects, the most commonly reported is nausea. If you get any other side effects that you are concerned about and think may be attributable to Champix, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Side effects that have been reported to date include the following:

- Stomach or bowel problems
 - Nausea
 - Constipation
 - Feeling bloated
 - Indigestion
 - Flatulence
 - Dry mouth
 - Vomiting
 - Stomach discomfort
- Sleep disturbances and abnormal dreams
- Headache or dizziness
- Fatigue
- Increased appetite
- Changes in the way food tastes (Dysgeusia)

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 to tell your doctor if you have a mental illness before you start taking Champix.

For a full list of possible side effects, especially those that require urgent attention, it is important that you read the Consumer Medicine Information provided with the medication.

Effectiveness of Zyban and Champix

Whilst NRT, Zyban and Champix are not a cure to stop smoking, clinical trials have shown that by taking either of these increases your chances to quit smoking for good. However, as with any type of medication, it may not work for everyone, and some people will be more suited to one form of medication than another.

Quitting is hard so **getting extra support** (like the Quitline **13 7848**) is also a good idea and always seek advice from your pharmacist or doctor when you are unsure.

Adverse reactions to any of these stop-smoking products can be reported to the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) (1800 044 114).

January 2008