

Treating Nicotine Withdrawal in the Hospital

Information for patients and families

Read this resource to learn:

- What symptoms of nicotine withdrawal are common
- What products are available in the hospital to treat nicotine withdrawal
- How to correctly use the products for nicotine withdrawal



Nicotine is a chemical that is found in cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and some electronic or “e-” cigarettes.

Nicotine is very addictive which means it is hard to stop using it. This is why many people continue to use tobacco products even though they cause health problems.

This resource is for people having nicotine withdrawal who smoke cigarettes. But, the information can also be used for people who use nicotine from other sources.

What is nicotine withdrawal?

When people who are addicted to nicotine cannot have nicotine, they can have uncomfortable effects such as:

- cravings for nicotine or cigarettes
- headaches
- nausea (feeling like throwing up)
- diarrhea
- fatigue or tiredness
- feeling irritable or “on edge”
- feeling anxious or more worried
- feeling low or down

What is nicotine replacement therapy?

Nicotine replacement therapy is a way to ease, or prevent symptoms of nicotine withdrawal without cigarettes.

There are many different products containing nicotine that can help. They include:

- nicotine patches
- nicotine gums
- nicotine inhalers

Why use nicotine replacements?

Nicotine replacements take the place of the nicotine in cigarettes. They may be used to:

- prevent or treat the uncomfortable symptoms of nicotine withdrawal
- quit smoking
- help with nicotine withdrawal when someone cannot smoke (such as when they are in the hospital)

Although nicotine is the chemical in cigarettes that causes addiction, it does not cause the health problems linked to smoking such as high blood pressure, lung cancer or stroke. Many other chemicals in tobacco and cigarette smoke cause these kinds of health problems.

How much do I need to take?

The amount of nicotine replacement therapy that you will be prescribed depends on how many cigarettes you smoke each day. You may also be asked questions such as how soon after you wake up in the morning do you smoke your first cigarette.

Does using nicotine replacement therapy mean I have to quit smoking?

No. Many people who are not ready to quit smoking use nicotine replacement therapy for a short time. The goal of short-term nicotine replacement is to make you more comfortable and prevent withdrawal symptoms while you are in the hospital.

Is nicotine replacement therapy safe?

Nicotine replacement is very safe and can be used by most people. Unlike cigarettes, nicotine is not linked to cancer, heart disease or second-hand smoke. Using nicotine products gives people relief from cravings and withdrawal symptoms.

Some people should be more careful using nicotine replacement therapy and may need to be closely supervised by their doctor or health care team. Before starting nicotine replacement therapy, talk to your doctor or health care team to make sure it is safe for you.

What types of nicotine replacement therapy are available?

At UHN there are 3 types of nicotine replacement therapies that help prevent or ease symptoms of nicotine withdrawal: **patch**, **gum** and **inhaler**.

Nicotine patch

The nicotine patch delivers nicotine to your blood for 12 to 24 hours. It's safe to use it while using the gum or an inhaler.

How do I use the nicotine patch?

1. If you are already wearing a nicotine patch remove the old one before putting on a new one.
2. Take the new nicotine patch out of the package and remove the plastic from the back.
3. Put the patch on a clean, dry, hairless area of skin on the upper arms, chest or back. Women should not put the nicotine patch on their breasts.

Choose a different part on your body for the patch so that your skin doesn't get irritated. Don't use the same place more than once every 7 days.

The patch is usually worn for 24 hours. If you are having strange dreams or trouble sleeping, ask your health care team about taking off the patch before you sleep.

Nicotine gum

Nicotine gum releases nicotine into the blood quickly. People with mouth or jaw problems such as temporomandibular joint dysfunction (TMJ) should not use nicotine gum.

How do I use the nicotine gum?

1. Remove the gum from the package.
2. Put a piece of gum in your mouth and bite down on it twice using your back teeth.
3. Use your tongue to push the gum against the inside of your cheek.
4. Hold the gum in your cheek for about 30 seconds. You will feel a tingling or peppery feeling in your cheek. This is the nicotine being released from the gum.
5. After 30 seconds, move the gum from your cheek and bite down on it twice again. Then return it to the inside of your cheek for 30 seconds.
6. Do this for about 30 minutes to release all of the nicotine from the piece of gum.

Acidic foods and drinks (such as juices or colas) can change the way that nicotine is absorbed from the gum.

Don't eat or drink anything other than water while chewing and for 15 minutes before and after chewing.

Nicotine inhaler

Like the nicotine gum, the nicotine inhaler works quickly.

How do I use the nicotine inhaler?

Loading the inhaler:

- Remove the reusable plastic inhaler from the wrapper.
- To open the inhaler, twist each end until the arrows on the middle of the inhaler are pointing towards each other. Then pull gently to separate them.
- Remove a cartridge from the package. The cartridge has the nicotine inside.
- Place the cartridge in the hole at the end of the longer half of the 2 inhaler parts. It does not matter which end of the cartridge goes into the inhaler.
- Attach the shorter part of the inhaler, similar to how you would put a cap on a pen or marker.
- Twist the ends of the inhaler so that the arrows are no longer lined up. This locks the inhaler.

Using the medicine:

- Hold the inhaler between your fingers, like a cigarette. The thinner end of the inhaler should be facing towards you.
- Place the tip of the inhaler with the nicotine cartridge in your mouth.
- Inhale.
- Hold the inhaled air in your cheeks for 5 to 10 seconds. Do not inhale the air into your lungs. The nicotine enters the blood from your cheeks.
- Breathe out.
- When you are done using the cartridge, return it to your nurse so it can be disposed of.

Repeat these steps for about 20 minutes.

What can I do to prevent nicotine withdrawal?

Let your health care team know as soon as possible that you smoke or regularly use products with nicotine.

Nicotine replacement therapy works best when the patch is used with the gum or inhaler, so ask your team if the combination is right for you. Use the gum and inhaler whenever you feel any of the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal (see page 1).

Use the instructions in this pamphlet to make sure you are using the products correctly.



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