

Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)

Cigarette smoking has been proven to cause many serious illnesses.

Nicotine is not generally thought to cause these illnesses. It is the other components of cigarettes that are dangerous to health.

However, nicotine is involved in the physical dependence on smoking.

This dependence makes it more difficult to stop smoking.

Stopping smoking suddenly may cause nicotine withdrawal symptoms, cravings and the desire to smoke.

Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) helps to prevent or reduce these symptoms while you are making changes to your behaviour.

It provides smaller amounts of nicotine than you get from cigarettes, delivered more slowly.

Benefits of NRT include:

- Reduction of withdrawal symptoms (see next section)
- Less nicotine absorption
- Eliminates exposure to the dangerous chemicals of cigarettes
- Increases success at stopping smoking
- Removes tobacco smoke from the environment
- Generally safe, certainly safer than continuing to smoke

Pregnant and breastfeeding women can use NRT if they would otherwise be unable to give up smoking. It is less harmful than continuing to smoke.

Patients with a heart condition can use NRT with their doctor's approval.

Refer to: www.medsafe.govt.nz.

NRT is available in a number of forms. Patches, gum and lozenges (detailed over page) are Government-subsidized at pharmacies (with a Quit Card). Inhalers and microtabs are not subsidized.

Nicotine Withdrawal Symptoms

- Irritability
- Anger
- Moodiness
- Restlessness
- Tenseness
- Anxiety
- Hunger
- Weight gain
- Poor concentration
- Sleep disturbance

If you have these symptoms while on nicotine replacement therapy, the cause is **not** the NRT.

You need to increase your dose of nicotine by double-patching or using the gum, lozenges etc. more frequently.

If you experience **nausea** (feeling as if you are going to throw up), faintness or headaches while on NRT, this **does** mean you are taking too high a dose.

Cut down until you feel OK again.

Using Nicotine Patches

Nicotine patches are available in different strengths.

The strength supplied depends on how much you usually smoke.

Decide where you want to wear the patch.

Choose a clean, dry area with no body hair, avoiding creams, lotions, oils or powder.

Cut the sachet and remove the patch. Don't cut the patches up.

Peel the backing and apply the sticky side to skin.

Press firmly for 10 seconds.

Change position each day. Wait three days before using the same area again.

It will take 1-2 hours for the effect to reach full strength. Gum and patches take a shorter time.

Using Nicotine Gum

Nicotine gum is not used like ordinary chewing gum. When you feel the urge to smoke:

1. Chew one piece of gum until the taste becomes strong or peppery as nicotine is released.
2. Roll the gum and "park" it in your cheek.
3. When the taste fades, chew again to release the strong peppery flavour, and park again in your cheek.

You can repeat these steps for 30 minutes, 8-12 times per day.

As you need less nicotine you can cut the gum up and mix with ordinary chewing gum.

Using Nicotine Lozenges

Do not suck the lozenge continuously like a throat lozenge. Do not bite or chew it.

1. Place one lozenge in the mouth between gums and cheek.
2. Suck slowly until the taste becomes strong.
3. Stop sucking until the taste fades, then suck again.
4. Occasionally move the lozenge from one side of the mouth to the other.

You can repeat these steps for 20-30 minutes, every 1-2 hours in the first six weeks, then gradually cutting down to one every 4-8 hours.

Warnings for Gum and Lozenges

Keep all NRT products out of reach of children, and dispose of carefully.

Don't eat or drink for 15 minutes beforehand or while using.

Nicotine can cause throat irritation and an increase in saliva at first.

Swallowing nicotine can cause irritation to the stomach or hiccups. Try chewing or sucking more slowly if this is a problem.