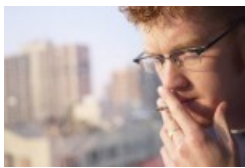


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INDEPENDENT, OBJECTIVE AND EVIDENCE-BASED

## Quitting smoking: How much do nicotine patches and gum help?



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There are many advantages to quitting smoking, but it is no easy task. The first week can be particularly difficult. People reach for a cigarette again mostly because their body is craving nicotine. This can make people easily irritated, aggressive, anxious or depressed.

Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) aims to reduce these withdrawal symptoms. You can buy these products in chemists without a prescription in Germany and other countries. In Germany, nicotine gum, lozenges and patches are available. However regulations prevent statutory health insurers from covering the costs of quit smoking medications. In other countries you can also get nasal sprays and inhalers. You can read about NRT in more detail in our Fact Sheet (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.222.en.html>).

To weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of NRT, researchers from the Cochrane Collaboration looked for trials that tested nicotine products. They systematically evaluated more than 130 trials involving more than 40,000 smokers. Their conclusion: NRT can help smokers quit. This was shown for smokers who smoked more than 15 cigarettes a day.

In the trials, all the different types of NRT were helpful. The majority of smokers were not able to quit though. Out of 100 smokers who did not use any nicotine product, only 10 were able to quit (10%). Out of 100 smokers who used a nicotine product, about 17 were managing without cigarettes 6 months later (17%). Some of the people who kept on smoking were able to reduce the number of cigarettes they smoked a day.

Whether or not NRT works does not seem to depend on whether or not there is additional support at the same time. Heavier smokers who used nicotine gum were more likely to quit if they used the higher dose of gum. For nicotine patches, an 8-week course appears to be enough. Using them for longer did not improve the chances of quitting. Using patches for 16 hours appears to be as effective as using them 24 hours a day.

Most people can tolerate NRT well. Nose sprays can irritate the membranes inside the nose, particularly if people have sinusitis or a runny nose. Nicotine patches can cause skin irritation or rashes where they are applied. Chewing gum

can sometimes cause aches in the jaw or stomach problems.

**Glossary**

## Cochrane Collaboration

The Cochrane Collaboration is an international network of thousands of researchers and others. They work together in teams called Cochrane Review Groups to answer questions about health care by doing systematic reviews of evidence. To achieve this, the members of the Collaboration have developed systems and methods for systematically finding and analysing the results of trials of health care interventions. The goal of the Cochrane Collaboration is to help patients, health care practitioners and others make more informed decisions about health care. You can read more about the Cochrane Collaboration at their website.

## **Sources**

Stead LF, Perera R, Bullen C, Mant D, Lancaster T. Nicotine replacement therapy for smoking cessation. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2008, Issue 1. [Cochrane summary (URL: <http://www.mrw.interscience.wiley.com/cochrane/clsysrev/articles/CD000146/frame.html> ) ]

## **The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG)**

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) was established by legislation to provide evaluations of the effectiveness, quality and efficiency of healthcare services. This includes the assessment of medicines as well as the publication of health information for consumers and patients.

## **Evidence basis of our health information**

Our information is based primarily on systematic reviews of the effects of health care. Systematic reviews are necessary to gain an objective picture of health care. In order to do this, a clear question is formulated. Researchers then find all the relevant studies that could answer this question. They then evaluate those studies.

You can find a list of the evidence and other scientific literature on which this information is based at [\*\*www.informedhealthonline.org\*\*](http://www.informedhealthonline.org)

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