

Nicotine gum

Please note: This information is not intended to replace the Consumer Medicine Information (pack insert) that may come with the nicotine gum. Ask your pharmacist for this information leaflet if it is not in the pack when you buy it.

Main points about nicotine replacement therapy products

- All forms of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) products – patches, gum, lozenges, mouth spray, and inhalator – have been proven to help people quit smoking.¹
- Using NRT products is always safer than continuing to smoke.² NRT products are a safe alternative to cigarettes for smokers.³
- Using NRT products will still increase your chances of quitting even if it does not completely control cravings.⁴
- NRT products reduce the severity of cravings but you may still have them, especially in situations in which you are used to smoking.⁵⁻⁷
- Combination therapy (using the patch plus another NRT product) is better at suppressing cravings than a single product.⁸ Some experts advise that most addicted smokers would benefit from using combination therapy.^{9, 10}
- NRT products work better when you also reduce triggers for cravings. Boost your chance of success by making your home smokefree and if possible, get rid of all cigarettes in your home and car.^{11, 12} You will also need to find new habits to take the place of smoking; for example, when socialising, relaxing, concentrating, filling in time or coping with emotions.
- Research shows that people who have the best chance of quitting using NRT products also get advice or support from their doctor, pharmacist or other trained advisor (such as through the Quitline).^{9, 13, 14}
- You will have more chance of success with the nicotine gum, lozenges, mouth spray, or inhalator if you use them regularly throughout the day as well as when you have cravings.⁶
- If you slip-up and have a cigarette, it is safe to continue using NRT products and to keep trying to quit.¹⁰
- It is common for smokers to attempt to quit a number of times before they successfully stop.¹⁵

Is nicotine gum suitable for me?

Nicotine gum works best for addicted smokers who want to quit.^{9, 13, 15} Your doctor or pharmacist can advise you whether nicotine gum is suitable for you.

Signs of addiction include:

- You smoke your first cigarette within 30 minutes of waking up^{9, 16}
- You smoke more than 10 cigarettes per day.^{9, 16} (There is no difference between smoking stronger or weaker tasting cigarettes.¹⁷)
- You suffer from withdrawal symptoms within 24 hours of stopping smoking, such as cravings, irritability, anxiety, depression, restlessness, hunger, poor concentration or sleep disturbances.^{9, 18}

It is not clear how helpful nicotine gum may be to smokers of 10 or less cigarettes per day, but use of a support service (such as the Quitline) and self-help materials is encouraged.^{9, 13, 15}

If you are age 12 years and over, you may use nicotine gum. However if you are under 18 years you should speak to your doctor before using the gum.^{9, 19, 20} It is strongly recommended that people in this age group discuss quitting smoking with a trained health advisor to benefit from using nicotine gum.^{15, 21}

How does nicotine gum work?

Addiction to nicotine in tobacco is the main reason why people continue to smoke. The gum works by replacing some of the nicotine you would normally inhale from cigarettes.²² It consists of nicotine mixed with chewing gum. Chewing the gum releases nicotine, which is then absorbed through the lining of your mouth.^{6, 21}

Using the gum can help to reduce withdrawal symptoms when you quit, such as cravings, irritability, and anxiety.^{6, 23, 24} However, it may not stop these symptoms completely.⁶ More options are listed below under *Why may I still have cravings while using the gum?*

Buying the gum

You can buy nicotine gum without prescription from pharmacies and most supermarkets. There are two different strengths of gum, 2 mg and 4 mg. There are different flavours, including classic flavour, fruit and mint, and various pack sizes. Pack sizes range from 15 pieces of gum costing about \$11, to 150 pieces costing about \$64 (based on recommended retail prices as at September 2017). Pharmacy or supermarket prices can be a few dollars higher or lower.

How well does the gum work?

People who use the nicotine gum are one and a half times more likely to quit and stay stopped.¹³ Nicotine gum (4 mg) also appears to delay the weight gain which may occur after quitting, but doesn't have a lasting effect beyond its use.¹⁵

When using the gum you take in less nicotine at a much slower rate than when smoking. This makes it less addictive and easier to stop using than cigarettes, but it is slower at easing cravings than a cigarette.^{3, 13, 22, 23, 25} Cravings are usually reduced after about 15 to 20 minutes of chewing the gum.⁶ Over a day, gum users typically absorb about one-third (2 mg gum) or two-thirds (4 mg gum) of the dose of nicotine that they would get from smoking a pack of cigarettes per day.²¹

Which strength of gum should I use?

Your pharmacist or doctor can advise you what strength of gum is suitable for you. If you smoke less than 20 cigarettes per day, the product information recommends the 2 mg gum. The 4 mg gum is recommended if you smoke over 20 cigarettes per day, or if you have not been able to quit using 2 mg gum.¹⁹⁻²¹ Some research suggests that if you usually smoke within 30 minutes of waking, the 4 mg gum may work better for you than the 2 mg gum.²⁶

What do I need to tell my pharmacist or doctor?

Before buying the gum, you should tell your pharmacist or doctor if you have an illness, or if you are taking any other medicines (even non-prescription ones). In some cases, you may need medical supervision or advice, or in other cases nicotine gum may not be suitable. Please check the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) that comes with the gum for the latest list of common medicines and medical conditions that may be affected by using the gum or stopping smoking.

Illnesses listed in the CMI for which you may need medical advice include: heart disease, any blood circulation disorder, kidney disease, liver disease, stomach ulcer or pain, hyperthyroidism, diabetes, and phaeochromocytoma (a tumour of the adrenal gland).¹⁹⁻²¹

You should not use the gum when your mouth or throat is sore.²¹ Nicotine gum may stick to and damage dentures, dental caps or partial bridges.^{20, 21} Medical guidelines recommend using a different nicotine product instead.²⁷

Can I use the gum if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, it is recommended that you first try to quit without medication.^{15, 21} However, if you are unable to quit without medication, you may use the gum to help you quit.⁹ While using the gum is considered safer than

smoking, even this smaller amount of nicotine may not be entirely risk-free for your baby. You need to discuss the risks and benefits with your pharmacist or doctor before using it, and you should tell the doctor supervising your pregnancy.^{2, 28} Mothers using the gum should breastfeed their baby first, then use the gum soon after. This allows time for the nicotine in their breastmilk to decrease before the next feed.^{19, 20, 29}

If you have any questions regarding these issues, please ask your doctor.

Using the gum

Problems to avoid

Don't chew nicotine gum like ordinary chewing gum – it won't work properly. Chew the gum slowly, until you feel a tingling sensation or a 'peppery' taste (usually after about 10 chews). Then rest it for one minute under your tongue, or between your cheek and teeth. This allows the nicotine to pass through the lining of your mouth. You should continue this 'chew - rest' sequence for 30 minutes, then throw away the gum.^{19-21, 23}

You should avoid eating and drinking 15 minutes before, and during, use of the gum (except for water). Acidic foods or drinks, such as orange juice, coffee, beer and soft drink, interfere with the amount of nicotine passing through the lining of your mouth from the gum.^{21, 23}

When to start use

Once you've bought the gum, you should set a quit date. On your quit day, start using the gum when you'd normally have your first cigarette in the morning or soon after your last cigarette – don't wait for cravings to hit first.

How much to use

The product information says that most people need about eight to 12 pieces of the 2 mg gum or four to 10 pieces of the 4 mg gum per day.^{19, 21} It recommends use for at least 12 weeks, and then to gradually decrease the number of pieces of gum you use each day.^{19, 21} One way to reduce your nicotine gum use is to gradually replace it with sugarless gum. You should not use more than 10 pieces of 4 mg gum, or 20 pieces of 2 mg gum, in one day.^{19, 21}

When to use

Some instructions on the packet recommend using the gum when you feel the urge to smoke. However, Australian General Practice Guidelines and other research note that under use of the gum is a common problem, and that the gum works better when used regularly.^{6, 27} Therefore, it may be better to use one piece every one to two hours and also using an extra piece if you have a strong craving.^{23, 27}

Remember: Nicotine gum is a medicine and you should use it according to the advice from your pharmacist or doctor.

Using combination therapy

Combination therapy means using two types of nicotine products, such as the nicotine patch and nicotine gum, at the same time. You should talk to your doctor or pharmacist first before using combination therapy. They may recommend combination therapy if you have had cravings or not succeeded in quitting when using a single nicotine replacement therapy product in the past.²¹

Evidence suggests that using combination therapy increases your chances of quitting compared to using one product alone,^{1, 13} and that it is better at suppressing cravings.⁸ Some experts advise that most addicted smokers would benefit from using combination therapy.^{9, 10} Research suggests that suppressing cravings on your quit date in particular may increase the chance of success.^{8, 30} However, living in a smoky home and having quick and easy access to cigarettes can work against you,¹¹ even when you use combination therapy.¹²

Combination therapy has been approved for the use of:

- the 25 mg or 15 mg 16 hour patch, or the 21 mg 24 hour patch *with*
- the 2 mg gum, 1.5 mg mini lozenge, 2 mg lozenge, mouth spray, or the nicotine inhalator.^{31, 32}

After applying the patch to reduce withdrawal symptoms, nicotine gum is used to relieve cravings, which can be triggered by old smoking situations or emotions.⁶ The product information recommends using at least four pieces of gum per day, and no more than 12 pieces per day.^{19, 21} The Consumer Medicine Information sheet that comes with the patches or gum will tell you how long you should use them and how to stop using them.^{19, 20}

Nicotine patches are available with a doctor's prescription through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), making them much cheaper. For more information, read *Fact Sheet: Nicotine patches*.

Why may I still have cravings while using the gum?

You may still have cravings while using the gum because:

- You may not be using it properly. Read the above section *Using the gum* and the product information to avoid common problems.
- You may not be getting enough nicotine from the gum. If your cravings are bad and do not lessen within 20 minutes of starting use of the gum, you could consider other options.⁶ These include using more or a higher dose of the gum, or using combination therapy. Speak to your pharmacist or doctor, if you think this is a likely cause of your cravings.
- You have an urge or desire to smoke when you are in situations where you are used to smoking.

Certain things may trigger cravings, such as:³³

- **places** where you normally smoke, such as home, work, or the pub
- **people** who you usually smoke with, such as family or friends; or being alone
- **habits or routines** where you are used to smoking, such as when drinking coffee or alcohol, talking on the telephone, after meals, or when you want to relax
- **emotions**, such as anger, boredom, being tense or upset; or for some people, when they are happy.

You need to understand why you smoke in order to plan ways to deal with these situations. People most successful at resisting urges to smoke use a range of coping strategies to help them.³³ Making your home smokefree, avoiding trigger situations where possible in the first few weeks, and getting rid of cigarettes in your home and car are all helpful strategies.^{11, 12, 34} Information, advice or support is available for the cost of a local call from the Quitline 13 7848.

Using nicotine gum to cut down, then quit

You can use the nicotine gum, mouth spray, inhalator, lozenge or mini lozenge while cutting down the number of cigarettes you smoke before stopping completely. This method is recommended for smokers who are not ready or unable to quit.^{35, 36}

The aim of this method is to stop smoking completely. There is no clear evidence that cutting down, without ever actually quitting, has any health benefits in the long term.³⁶

The first step is to start using the nicotine gum, and cut down the number of cigarettes you smoke per day by half over six weeks. Somewhere between six weeks to six months (preferably as soon as possible), you stop smoking cigarettes altogether. You then continue to use the gum in the same way as people who have just stopped smoking suddenly (refer to *Using the gum* above).^{19, 21, 28} The Quitline (13 7848) can offer you advice on cutting down and provide support when you want to stop completely.

Smoking while using nicotine gum does not appear to increase health risks over smoking alone.^{2, 10, 36} If you reduce your smoking while using the gum, your nicotine blood levels are likely to be no higher than when you were smoking only. There have been no reports of serious side effects from using the gum while smoking in studies.^{13, 36, 37} However, some people using the gum may have side effects (described below).

If you are not ready to quit, the 'cut down then quit' method used with a support service will increase your chance of quitting in the long term.^{35, 38} But if you are ready to quit, using a nicotine replacement therapy product to stop smoking completely offers a better chance of success at quitting than the cut down method.³⁹

Side effects of nicotine gum

Common side effects of the gum include hiccups, sore mouth or jaw, headache, indigestion and nausea.^{21, 23, 27} Some of these symptoms may be relieved by chewing more slowly and resting the gum.²³ Most users rate these reactions as mild.^{21, 23, 40} If side effects do not fade within a week or two, or they worry you, see your pharmacist or doctor.

Serious side effects are rare,⁴¹ and are described in the Consumer Medicine Information (pack insert) that comes with the gum.^{19, 20} If you have these symptoms, follow the instructions in the leaflet and see a doctor as soon as possible. These symptoms can occur from absorbing too much nicotine, so do not smoke.

Safety of nicotine gum

Using the nicotine gum is always safer than continuing to smoke. Tobacco smoke contains many cancer-causing substances, carbon monoxide and other dangerous chemicals, which the nicotine gum does not.² Unlike smoking, nicotine is not a major cause of increased risk for heart disease or cancer.^{2, 42, 43} The gum does not increase the risk of heart attack if you have heart disease.^{2, 44} A small number of people may transfer their nicotine addiction from cigarettes to the gum. Though this is not ideal, it is safer than smoking.^{2, 21, 27}

It is important to store and dispose of the gum so that children and animals cannot get it, as it can be dangerous for them.^{19, 20}

What do I do if I start smoking again despite using nicotine gum?

If you slip-up and have a puff or a cigarette, don't let it lead you back to full-time smoking. It is safe to keep using the gum and re-commit to stopping smoking.^{6, 10} Think of your reasons for quitting and what you have achieved so far. Call the Quitline if you want to discuss your smoking.

Think about getting some extra help if you are trying to stop smoking using the gum and:

- you are smoking a similar number of cigarettes as usual and you feel you're not making progress towards stopping, or
- you are still smoking after using the gum for three months, even if it's just now and then.¹⁰

Your doctor or the Quitline can help you address what's stopping you from quitting and discuss further options.

It is common for smokers to attempt to quit a number of times before successfully staying stopped, even when using the gum or other nicotine products.¹⁵ For many people, re-adjusting to living without cigarettes is a learning process. It may take a

while to figure out alternatives to cigarettes in certain situations. The purpose of the gum is to ease nicotine withdrawal symptoms while you deal with other aspects of quitting smoking.⁶

If you have found the nicotine gum useful in quitting smoking, but have taken up smoking again, you should consider using the gum or another nicotine replacement therapy product when you quit again.^{3, 13}

Who can I talk to for more information?

- Your doctor is an important source of information, particularly if you have an illness, or you are taking any other medicines.
- Your pharmacist can give you advice about stopping smoking.
- Quitline 13 7848: Quitline advisors can help you with support, advice, information and a variety of resources, whether you have already quit or are just thinking about it.

Online resources

The Quit website www.quit.org.au provides a range of information that you can read, interact with and download. You can find out more about the Quitline, QuitCoach and QuitTxt.

QuitCoach is a free interactive website that asks you a series of questions about your smoking, and then gives you advice about quitting which is tailored to your situation. To find out more go to www.quitcoach.org.au.

QuitTxt provides regular SMS messages including tips and encouragement to help you keep on track throughout your quit attempt. To begin, all you need to do is register and complete a brief questionnaire at www.quit.org.au/quittxt.

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