

## Nicotine lozenges

*Please note: This information is not intended to replace the Consumer Medicine Information (pack insert) that may come with the nicotine lozenge. If you do not have a pack insert, ask your pharmacist for it, or for advice if one is not available.*

### Main points about nicotine replacement therapy products

- All forms of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) products – patches, lozenges, mouth spray, gum and inhalator – have been proven to help people quit smoking.<sup>1</sup>
- Using NRT products is always safer than continuing to smoke.<sup>2</sup> NRT products are a safe alternative to cigarettes for smokers.<sup>3</sup>
- Using NRT products will still increase your chances of quitting even if it does not completely control cravings.<sup>4</sup>
- NRT products reduce the severity of cravings but you may still have them, especially in situations in which you are used to smoking.<sup>5-7</sup>
- Combination therapy (using the patch plus another NRT product) is better at suppressing cravings than a single nicotine product.<sup>8</sup> Some experts advise that most addicted smokers would benefit from using combination therapy.<sup>9, 10</sup>
- 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.<sup>11, 12</sup> 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).<sup>9, 13, 14</sup>
- The nicotine lozenges, mouth spray, inhalator or gum will not work as well if you do not use them often enough or you use them only after you have cravings.<sup>6</sup>
- If you slip-up and have a cigarette, it is safe to continue using NRT products and to keep trying to quit.<sup>10</sup>
- It is common for smokers to attempt to quit a number of times before they successfully stop.<sup>15</sup>

## Is the nicotine lozenge suitable for me?

The nicotine lozenge works best for addicted smokers who want to quit.<sup>9, 13, 15</sup> Your doctor or pharmacist can advise you whether the nicotine lozenge is suitable for you.

Signs of addiction include:

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

It is not known whether smokers of 10 or less cigarettes per day would benefit from using the nicotine lozenge, but counselling and use of self-help materials is encouraged.<sup>9, 13, 15</sup>

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

## How does the nicotine lozenge work?

Addiction to nicotine in tobacco is the main reason why people continue to smoke. The lozenge works by replacing some of the nicotine you would normally inhale from cigarettes.<sup>21</sup> It is a tablet that dissolves in your mouth. It slowly releases nicotine, which you absorb through the lining of your mouth.<sup>6, 19</sup>

Using the lozenge can help to reduce withdrawal symptoms when you quit, such as cravings, difficulty concentrating, frustration, restlessness, and anxiety.<sup>22-24</sup> The higher dose reduces more of these symptoms than the lower dose.<sup>23</sup> However, it may not stop these symptoms completely.<sup>6</sup> More options are listed below under '*Why may I still have cravings while using the lozenge?*'

## Buying the lozenge

You can buy nicotine lozenges without prescription from pharmacies and some supermarkets. There are two strengths of lozenge, 2 mg and 4 mg, and two strengths of mini lozenge (also called 'Minis'®), 1.5 mg and 4 mg. They come in pack sizes ranging from 20 to 80 lozenges, and 20 or 60 mini lozenges. The recommended retail prices, as at September 2017, are around \$18 for a pack of 20 lozenges and \$52 for a pack of 80 lozenges. Mini lozenges cost about \$19 for a pack of 20 and \$50 for a pack of 60. Store prices can be a few dollars higher or lower.

## How well does the lozenge work?

People who use the nicotine lozenge are twice as likely to quit and stay stopped.<sup>13</sup> The 4 mg nicotine lozenge appears to reduce weight gain that may occur after quitting, but doesn't have a lasting effect beyond its use.<sup>22</sup>

When using the lozenge 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.<sup>3, 13, 21, 25</sup> The lozenge dissolves within 16 to 19 minutes and most people find that it starts to ease cravings after about five minutes.<sup>19</sup> The mini lozenge dissolves faster (10 to 13 minutes) than the lozenge.<sup>20</sup> Over a day, mini lozenge users typically absorb more nicotine than from a similar strength gum.<sup>20</sup>

## Which strength of lozenge should I use?

Your pharmacist or doctor can advise you which lozenge strength is suitable for you.

The 4 mg lozenge or mini lozenge is recommended for more dependent smokers: that is, if you usually have your first cigarette of the day within 30 minutes of waking up, or you smoke more than 20 cigarettes per day.<sup>19, 26</sup>

The lower dose lozenge or mini lozenge is recommended for less dependent smokers: if you usually smoke your first cigarettes more than 30 minutes after you wake up, or you smoke 20 cigarettes or less per day.<sup>19, 26</sup>

## What do I need to tell my pharmacist or doctor?

Before buying the lozenge, 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 the nicotine lozenge may not be suitable. Please check the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) that comes with the lozenge, or with your pharmacist, for the latest list of common medicines and medical conditions that may be affected by using the lozenge or stopping smoking.

Illnesses listed in the CMI for which you may need medical advice include: heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, any blood circulation disorder, kidney disease, liver disease, stomach ulcer or pain, hyperthyroidism, diabetes, phaeochromocytoma (a tumour of the adrenal gland) and any allergic reaction that involves swelling of the lips, face and throat or itchy skin rash.<sup>19, 26</sup>

## Can I use the lozenge if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, it is recommended that you first try to quit without medication.<sup>15, 19, 20</sup> However, if you are unable to quit without medication, you may use the lozenge or mini lozenge to help you quit.<sup>9</sup> While using the lozenge 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.<sup>9, 27</sup> Mothers using the lozenge should breastfeed their baby first, then use the lozenge soon after. This allows time for the body to reduce the nicotine in their breastmilk before the next feed.<sup>19, 26, 28</sup>

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

## Using the lozenge

Place a lozenge in your mouth and let it dissolve. This should take about 16 to 19 minutes for the lozenge and 10 to 13 minutes for the mini lozenge.<sup>19, 20</sup> Move the lozenge about in your mouth from time to time. Do not chew or swallow the lozenge.

### A problem to avoid

You should avoid eating and drinking 15 minutes before, and during, use of the lozenge (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 lozenge.<sup>19, 26</sup>

### When to start use

Once you've bought the lozenge, you should set a quit date. Start using the lozenge first thing in the morning of your quit date or soon after your last cigarette – don't wait for cravings to hit first.

### How much to use

The product information recommends using one lozenge every one to two hours or when you are tempted to smoke.<sup>19, 26</sup> Researchers have found that those who use more lozenges (about 10 to 11 per day) had a better chance of quitting.<sup>22, 29</sup> Do not use more than 15 lozenges or 4 mg mini lozenges per day, and no more than 20 of the 1.5 mg mini lozenges.<sup>19, 26</sup> Do not use more than one lozenge at a time.<sup>19, 26</sup>

After six to 12 weeks, you may reduce the number of lozenges per day over the following weeks. After you stop using them, you can still use a lozenge if you have a strong craving to smoke.<sup>19, 26</sup>

**Remember:** The nicotine lozenge is a medicine and you should use it according to the advice from your pharmacist or doctor.

## Why may I still having cravings while using the lozenge?

You may still have cravings while using the lozenge because:

- You may not be using it properly. Read the above section 'Using the lozenge' and the product information to avoid common problems.
- You may not be getting enough nicotine from the lozenge. If your cravings are bad and do not begin to lessen within 10 minutes of starting use of the lozenge or mini lozenge, you could consider other options.<sup>19-21</sup> These include using a higher dose of the lozenge, or using two nicotine products at the same time. 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:<sup>30</sup>

- *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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>11, 12, 31</sup> Information, advice or support is available for the cost of a local call from the Quitline 13 7848.

## Using combination therapy

Combination therapy means using two types of nicotine products, such as the nicotine patch and nicotine lozenge, 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.<sup>19, 20</sup>

Research suggests that using combination therapy increases your chances of quitting compared to using one product alone,<sup>1, 13</sup> and that it is better at suppressing cravings.<sup>8</sup> Some experts advise that most addicted smokers would benefit from using combination therapy.<sup>9, 10</sup> Research suggests that suppressing cravings on your quit date in particular may increase the chance of success.<sup>8, 32</sup> However, living in a

smoky home and having quick and easy access to cigarettes can work against you,<sup>11</sup> even when you use combination therapy.<sup>12</sup>

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 1.5 mg mini lozenge, 2 mg lozenge, mouth spray, 2 mg nicotine gum, or the nicotine inhalator.<sup>20, 33, 34</sup>

After applying the patch to reduce withdrawal symptoms, the nicotine lozenge is used to relieve cravings, which can be triggered by old smoking situations or emotions.<sup>6</sup> The product information recommends using at least four lozenges per day, and no more than 12 lozenges per day.<sup>19, 20</sup> The Consumer Medicine Information sheet that comes with the lozenge, or the company website, will tell you how long you should use them and how to stop using them.<sup>26</sup>

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

## Using the nicotine lozenge to cut down, then quit

You can use the nicotine lozenge, mini lozenge, mouth spray, gum, or inhalator 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.<sup>35, 36</sup>

The aim of the 'cut down then quit' 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.<sup>36</sup>

The first step is to start using the nicotine lozenge, 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 lozenge in the same way as people who have just stopped smoking suddenly (refer to '*Using the lozenge*' above).<sup>19, 20, 27</sup> The Quitline (13 7848) can offer you advice on cutting down and provide support when you want to stop completely.

Smoking while using the nicotine lozenge does not appear to increase health risks over smoking alone.<sup>2, 36</sup> If you reduce your smoking while using the lozenge, 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 lozenge while smoking in studies.<sup>13, 36, 37</sup> However, some people using the lozenge may have side effects (described below).

## Side effects of the nicotine lozenge

Common side effects of the lozenge include hiccups, indigestion, gas, nausea, diarrhoea, sore throat and mouth irritation.<sup>19, 20, 38</sup> Most users rate these reactions as mild.<sup>26, 38</sup> 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,<sup>39</sup> and are described in the Consumer Medicine Information (pack insert) that comes with the lozenge. If you have these symptoms, follow the instructions in the leaflet and see a doctor as soon as possible.<sup>26</sup> These symptoms can occur from absorbing too much nicotine, so do not smoke.

## Safety of the nicotine lozenge

Using the nicotine lozenge is always safer than continuing to smoke. Tobacco smoke contains many cancer-causing substances, carbon monoxide and other dangerous chemicals, which the nicotine lozenge does not.<sup>2</sup> Unlike smoking, nicotine is not a major cause of increased risk for heart disease or cancer.<sup>2, 40-42</sup> The lozenge does not increase the risk of heart attack in smokers who have stable heart disease.<sup>2, 13, 40</sup>

It is important to store and dispose of the lozenge so that children and animals cannot get it, as it can be dangerous for them.<sup>26</sup>

## What do I do if I start smoking again despite using the nicotine lozenge?

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 lozenge and re-commit to stopping smoking.<sup>10</sup> Think of your reasons for quitting and what you have achieved so far. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or 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 lozenge 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 lozenge for three months, even if it's just now and then.<sup>10</sup>

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 lozenge or other nicotine replacement therapy products.<sup>15</sup> 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 lozenge is to ease nicotine withdrawal symptoms while you deal with other aspects of quitting smoking.<sup>6</sup>

If you have found the nicotine lozenge useful in quitting smoking, but have taken up smoking again, you should consider using the lozenge or another nicotine replacement therapy product when you quit again.<sup>3, 13</sup>

## 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](http://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](http://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](http://www.quit.org.au/quittxt).

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