

Kicking the Habit

Quitting smoking is one of the most important health and life decisions a person can make. More than one third of cancer deaths and countless cases of heart disease, breathing disorders, and stroke, as well as low birth weight in babies, are the result of smoking. Quitting smoking reduces the risk of cancers, breathing disorders, heart disease, and stroke for smokers and those who breathe the air around them.

Tobacco smoke contains thousands of chemicals, including 60 that are known to cause cancer (**carcinogens**). The chemical **nicotine**, which is present in tobacco, is responsible for the physical addiction of smoking.

The July 24/31, 2002, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about the use of a medication called bupropion in smoking cessation.



QUITTING SMOKING

Quitting smoking is hard, but thousands of people are able to kick the habit by using a number of strategies.

- Inform your doctor that you want to quit and ask for help to achieve this goal.
- Join a smoking cessation group to get group support in your quit effort.
- Stick to your decision to quit. If you feel irritable, light-headed, have trouble sleeping, and feel cravings for tobacco, remember that these feelings will pass.
- Get extra sleep, drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day, and try to exercise regularly.
- Ask your family and friends to help you maintain your decision to quit.

MEDICATIONS TO HELP YOU QUIT

The nicotine in tobacco causes physical addiction, but **nicotine replacement therapy** can make kicking the habit easier. Nicotine replacement is available in several forms.

- **Nicotine gum** can be used as needed (10 to 15 pieces a day) when the smoker feels a craving for nicotine.
- **Nicotine nasal spray** is a liquid that can be sprayed into the nose to provide nicotine.
- **Nicotine inhaler devices** look like cigarettes but deliver a controlled dose of nicotine without the other harmful chemicals.
- **Nicotine patches** are worn throughout the day to release nicotine at a steady rate through the skin.

Bupropion (Zyban) is a prescription medication that does not contain nicotine and is not a replacement therapy. Instead, it affects certain chemicals in the brain to decrease symptoms associated with nicotine addiction, such as cravings and other withdrawal symptoms.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Cancer Society
800/227-2345
www.cancer.org
- American Lung Association
800/586-4872
www.lungusa.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Office on Smoking and Health
800/232-1311
www.cdc.gov/tobacco

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. A Patient Page on ending tobacco dependence was published in the September 1, 1999, issue, one on tobacco and teens in the November 3, 1999, issue, one on treating tobacco dependence in the June 28, 2000, issue, and one on preventing tobacco use in children and adolescents in the August 9, 2000, issue.

Sources: American Cancer Society, American Lung Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health

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