



VA/DOD CLINICAL PRACTICE GUIDELINE FOR TOBACCO USE TREATMENT

Department of Veterans Affairs
Department of Defense

Patient Summary

QUALIFYING STATEMENTS

The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense guidelines use the best and most recent information that is available at the time they are published. Guidelines provide information that providers, healthcare team members and patients can use to provide better care for individuals who use tobacco. They do not define a standard of care, and you should not use them in this way.

This Clinical Practice Guideline is based on a complete and organized review of both clinical studies and studies about how different intervention approaches affect peoples' tobacco use cessation efforts. A panel of experts from a number of clinical fields developed this Guideline. The Guideline clearly explains how different care options relate to health outcomes. To do this, the experts rated both the quality of the clinical studies and the strength of the recommendations.

It is normal for providers to vary in how they plan to treat patients who use tobacco because they take into account the needs of each patient, the available resources, and the limits that are unique to their healthcare setting or type of practice. Healthcare professionals should assess how well these Guidelines apply to each patient, and their clinical setting or situation. Patients can use the information in this Guideline to understand the different ways that tobacco use can be treated.

These guidelines do not represent Department of Veterans Affairs or TRICARE policy. The Guideline recommendations for specific treatments do not guarantee coverage of the patient's care by civilian providers or healthcare facilities. You can find more information on current TRICARE benefits at www.tricare.mil or by contacting your regional TRICARE Managed Care Support Contractor.

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I. Tobacco and nicotine use

Tobacco use is the top cause of death in the United States (US) and worldwide that can be prevented. It is related to serious negative effects on your health, both in the short- and long-term.(1) Short-term effects include your body having a harder time getting and using oxygen. This leads to higher blood pressure and heart rate.(2) Long-term impacts include a higher risk for multiple types of cancer, as well as heart and lung diseases.(3) Every organ in the body can be harmed by long-term tobacco use.

Tobacco use in the military causes issues across the Services, such as lessening readiness and productivity.(4) Most individuals who use tobacco do want to stop, making it important to have science-backed treatments that work.(4) Quitting tobacco is often called tobacco cessation in research. In this document, more common terms of quitting or stopping tobacco use will be used.

Did you know?

- Tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable death in the US.(1)
- Military and Veteran populations often have higher rates of tobacco use compared to those who are not in the military or a Veteran.(3)
- There are many helpful treatment options available for those who are interested in reducing or quitting tobacco use.

II. Goals for tobacco use treatment

The overall goal of treatment is long-term quitting of tobacco use. This means that an individual is no longer using tobacco at all and will never return to use. However, healthcare providers understand that this can be very hard for many people. Most people try to quit many times before stopping for good. Even if you only quit for a short time, there are immediate positive health impacts. For example, lower heart rate, better lung function, and improved exercise performance are experienced. While quitting tobacco can be challenging, the short and long-term health benefits of quitting make it worth it.

III. Treatment options for stopping tobacco use

There are a variety of helpful treatments for stopping tobacco use. However, most people do not use these strategies. Instead, they try to stop on their own.(5) Even if you've tried to quit before, it is worth thinking about if you used the best strategies available. It may be time to rethink treatment. The most helpful plan for stopping tobacco use includes a combination of both medication and counseling.

- Medication

There are many types of medications used to help people stop tobacco and nicotine use. While these medications may work in different ways, they are all helpful in improving your chances of stopping for good. Some medications provide nicotine to help you slowly lower the nicotine level in your body when you stop using tobacco. Medications that provide nicotine are called nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). NRT lessens your cravings for nicotine. It also helps to manage and decrease nicotine withdrawal side effects.

There are also two prescription medicines, bupropion and varenicline, which do not have nicotine in them. These medications can help you have less nicotine cravings and other

side effects after quitting. Contact your health care provider if you are interested in using medications to help you stop tobacco use.

1. Bupropion
2. Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT): nicotine gum, lozenge, and patch
3. Varenicline

- Behavioral Strategies

Combining medication with behavioral counseling (“therapy”) is the most helpful strategy for long-term quitting. Generally, at least four sessions are recommended. Specific treatments that have been backed by science include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Counseling can be done in multiple ways, including one-on-one, group, or phone sessions. Usually, counseling focuses on learning from past quit attempts and skills to manage challenges (such as cravings or triggers). It also includes developing a quit plan. Additionally, individuals are encouraged to develop a strong support system that can help them reach their quit goal.

Exercise, acupuncture, diet management, mindfulness, and hypnotherapy (aka hypnosis) may be helpful for some people trying to quit using tobacco. On their own, they are not enough to lead to long-term quitting. Talk with your provider about adding these options to your treatment plan if they are important to you.

IV. Questions to ask your care team

Ask about anything that is not clear to you. Some examples may include:

- **If everyone in my unit smokes, why should I quit?**
 - Continued tobacco use can hurt job performance, including poorer night vision and endurance. If you desire to perform at your highest level, continued tobacco use could make it harder. Additionally, even if everyone in your social circle smokes or vapes, you need to think about your own long-term health.
- **I have tried to quit before, what should I do now?**
 - Stopping tobacco use can be hard. Talking with your healthcare providers can help ease some of your worries. Healthcare providers can help figure out what went wrong last time and how you can make a better plan this time. Often, people need more than one quit attempt before they stop using tobacco/nicotine for good.
 - Combining medications and counseling can provide you with the best tools to stop tobacco use long-term.
- **Will I have to take medication forever?**
 - No, you do not have to be on medications forever. However, you can expect to be on them for 12-24 weeks.
 - Medications help with nicotine withdrawals (which usually last a few weeks). They also allow time for you to change habits that you may have related to tobacco use.
- **I use other tobacco products, not cigarettes. How can I quit?**

- Some of the strategies for quitting cigarettes, such as varenicline and counseling, are also helpful for quitting smokeless tobacco.
- **What if I quit but then start using again?**
 - Try not to get frustrated. We know that folks usually try quitting a few times before quitting for good. Be sure that you are using the most helpful, science-backed strategies, such as combining medication with counseling.
- **Will my mental health get worse if I quit using tobacco?**
 - The short answer is no.
 - You might feel uncomfortable side effects from nicotine withdrawal at first. However, studies suggest that stopping tobacco use may improve your mental health in the long-term. Work with your healthcare team to develop a plan that works best for you and your specific needs. Keep in mind that the best plan is one that you are likely to stick to. [\(6-8\)](#)

V. You can find more information on tobacco use treatment here:

- A VA website that provides information about treatment options as well as other resources that may be helpful:
 - <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/>
- Quit lines can be used for additional support and counseling, also providing free coaching in a flexible format
 - (1-800-QUIT-NOW; 1-855-QUIT-VET)
- Digital smoking treatments provide a hub for resources and information
 - Smokefree.gov
 - Veterans.Smokefree.gov

VI. References

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