

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT NICOTINE PATCHES, GUM AND LOZENGES

Are nicotine patches, gum and lozenges safe?

Nicotine is not the harmful substance in cigarettes. It is the thousands of other poisons in tobacco smoke that cause tobacco-related diseases. Pure nicotine when used as a medicine to quit smoking has not been shown to cause cancer or any other illness. However nicotine can be toxic at high doses, so the patches, gum and lozenges should be stored away from children and pets.

How long should I use the nicotine patches and gum/lozenges?

You have been provided with a 10-week supply of nicotine patches and nicotine gum or lozenges. We suggest that you use all your medication while you are trying to quit smoking. You may also need to purchase additional nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) after 10 weeks if you find it effective, but feel like you are at risk of relapsing to smoking if you stop using the nicotine patches, gum or lozenges. We encourage you to speak with a health care provider if you decide to continue using NRT so that you are selecting the NRT type and dose that meets your needs.

Can I smoke while using NRT?

Ideally you should not smoke while using NRT, but it may happen. If you smoke while using NRT, you may get too much nicotine, which could make you feel nauseated, light-headed, weak, get a headache or vomit. If this happens, please remove the patch, stop using the gum/lozenges, stop smoking and seek immediate medical attention.

What should I do if I can't quit smoking?

Quitting smoking is a process. NRT can increase the chances of quitting by helping to alleviate withdrawal symptoms but it is more effective if you combine the NRT with counselling. You can call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 for counselling or talk to your health care provider for more support. You can also visit www.stoponthenet.com for more helpful resources and tips.

Will I experience any side effects from using the patch, gum or lozenges?

We recommend you read the insert provided in the nicotine patch box for a full list of symptoms or side effects you could experience while using NRT. Some mild side effects you could experience from using the patch include skin rash, irritation, itching or burning. A slight amount of redness or itchiness is normal and should improve after a few days. If it does not, you can apply lotion to help soothe the irritation or ask your health care provider what else you can do to alleviate your symptoms. You can also try putting the patch on a different area of your upper body each day.

Some mild side effects you could experience from using the gum/lozenges include throat and mouth irritation, nausea, indigestion, hiccups, or sore jaw.

Signs of an overdose include bad headaches, dizziness, nausea, abdominal pain, drooling, vomiting, diarrhea, cold sweat, blurred vision, difficulty with hearing, mental confusion, weakness and fainting, rapid heartbeat and difficulty breathing. At high doses, these symptoms may be followed by low blood pressure, weak and irregular pulse, breathing difficulties, extreme exhaustion, circulatory collapse and general convulsions.

If you experience any of these symptoms, please remove the patch, stop using the gum/lozenges, do not use any products with nicotine (including cigarettes) and seek immediate medical attention.

When should I apply the patch?

Ideally, you should apply the patch immediately after a shower in the morning. This is to prevent the levels of nicotine from being too high during the night and interfering with your sleep. Some people, especially shift workers, find it useful to apply their patch before they begin their shift.

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The patch does not stick very well to my skin. What should I do?

Select a clean, non-hairy area of your skin. Make sure it is clean and dry and avoid using soap or lotions on the area. It helps to clean that area of your skin with an alcohol wipe before applying the patch but make sure it is very dry before you apply the patch. If it still does not stick, you can try medical adhesive tape, which can be purchased at your local pharmacy, to help keep the patch on.

How safe is absorbing nicotine through the skin?

There are no risks associated with this type of nicotine delivery. However, some people get itchy with the use of the patch. This itchiness is not dangerous if it is localized to where the patch is applied. However, if you get a rash that is in areas where the patch was not applied and your whole body gets itchy, you may be allergic to tape and should stop using the patch. Please seek immediate medical attention from the emergency room, especially if you also have difficulty breathing.

Should I take my patch off at bedtime?

You can keep the patch on for 24 hours. This is recommended so that you are not in withdrawal when you wake up the next morning.

Can I swim or shower if I'm wearing the patch?

Yes you can definitely do both. Getting wet will not interfere with the effectiveness of the patch. However, make sure that the patch is stuck evenly all around to your skin and that there are no gaps.

I'm having nightmares or I can't sleep since I started using the patch. Is this normal?

This can happen to some people. Usually the nightmares go away. If the dreams are very troubling or your sleep is not returning to normal within a few days, you can remove the patch before bedtime and put a new one on in the morning. Try not to smoke while you are waiting for the patch to "kick in".

Am I just switching my addiction from cigarettes to nicotine replacement therapy?

Cigarettes are far more addictive than nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) like the nicotine patch because of the way in which they deliver nicotine. Smoking cigarettes is the most addictive method of nicotine delivery. Because nicotine is absorbed through the lungs, it takes only 10-19 seconds for the drug to reach the brain. The patch delivers nicotine through the skin much more slowly, in lower doses, and more evenly than cigarettes. Because of the rate and route of drug delivery, nicotine patches have very low potential for addiction.