

NICOTINE REPLACEMENT THERAPY (NRT) WORKS - NO BUTTS!

- ▶ NRT CAN DOUBLE A SMOKER'S CHANCES OF QUITTING, EVEN IF THEY'VE PREVIOUSLY TRIED TO QUIT USING NRT
- ▶ COMBINING NRT PREPARATIONS AT THE SAME TIME IS SAFE
- ▶ NRT IS SAFE AND WELL TOLERATED, EVEN IF THE PERSON CONTINUES TO SMOKE
- ▶ NRT FORMULATIONS ARE LESS LIKELY TO LEAD TO DEPENDENCE
- ▶ ASSESS THE RISKS VS BENEFITS OF NRT FOR ADOLESCENTS, PATIENTS WHO ARE PREGNANT, AND PEOPLE WITH CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE
- ▶ NRT CAN BE USED SAFELY WITH OTHER MEDICINES

NRT doesn't alleviate every unpleasant effect associated with nicotine withdrawal but it does make quitting more tolerable and cigarettes less rewarding to smoke. **NRT roughly doubles a smoker's chances of long-term abstinence. NRT appears to remain effective in the presence of multiple prior treatment failures;** providing repeated courses can help with recovery from relapses and encourages new quit attempts. NRT is also effective for limiting withdrawal during periods of forced abstinence, such as during a hospital admission.

Safety concerns about using multiple NRT products (e.g. gum and patch) together are unfounded. There is a moderate increase in the odds of quitting by using combinations of products over a single product. **The evidence suggests that full-strength patches, gum and lozenges are more effective than the lower-strength ones for highly dependent smokers. Always use sufficient NRT to relieve withdrawal symptoms/cravings; continue for 8 -12 weeks.**

NRT assisted reduction strategy is likely to attract smokers who are not interested in stopping right away. When using this strategy, the smoker should aim to halve their cigarette consumption during the first six weeks. In the following 18 weeks this can be either maintained or cut back further to fewer, or no cigarettes at all. This 'cut down then quit' approach is safe.

The likelihood of dependence with NRT products is very low probably due to the speed of nicotine delivery relative to cigarettes. It takes around 7-10 seconds for nicotine from a cigarette to reach the brain. In comparison, the nicotine in oral NRT formulations can take up to 20 minutes, and up to 3-5 hours for transdermal patches.

Generally, NRT is safe for people with diabetes/high blood pressure and does not increase the risk of heart attack.

Although NRT is unlikely to be more harmful than the nicotine from cigarettes (and associated toxins), assess the risks vs benefits of NRT with patients who are aged 12-18 yrs old, pregnant/breastfeeding, or have cardiovascular disease. Consider using intermittent (for a lower daily dose), rapidly reversible products, i.e. gum rather than patch.

NRT is not contraindicated with other medicines. Please remember it's the constituents of smoke (and not nicotine itself) that induce liver enzyme activity and increase the metabolism of some medicines, e.g. clozapine. Such medicines may require a dose reduction when the patient stops smoking; this adjustment is independent of whether or not they receive NRT.

KEY REFERENCES

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Ministry of Health. 2007. New Zealand Smoking Cessation Guidelines. Wellington: Ministry of Health <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/nz-smoking-cessation-guidelines> accessed 30/03/10.

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