



Education

Nicotine Withdrawal

What is nicotine withdrawal?

Tobacco products (cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, pipe tobacco, and cigars) contain the chemical nicotine. Nicotine is as addicting as cocaine or heroine. Most people who quit smoking or chewing tobacco have physical symptoms of withdrawal from nicotine.

How does it occur?

Nicotine affects the brain. It creates pleasure in the brain, and it improves your mood. So, when you quit smoking or chewing tobacco, you may have physical symptoms while your body is getting used to being without the nicotine.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of nicotine withdrawal may include:

- nervousness
- trouble concentrating
- depressed mood
- nicotine craving
- irritability
- restlessness
- headaches
- drowsiness
- upset stomach
- slowed heart rate
- increased appetite
- shaky hands
- trouble sleeping.

The symptoms of withdrawal from nicotine may be very strong, especially during the first 72 hours after you stop using tobacco.

How is it diagnosed?

There are no specific tests for nicotine withdrawal. Your health care provider will ask about your symptoms and your history of tobacco use.

How is it treated?

Nicotine replacement therapy lets you slowly decrease the amount of nicotine in your system over time. Using nicotine gum, patches, or an inhaler as you quit tobacco helps reduce cravings and ease physical symptoms. The dose of nicotine is slowly decreased over several weeks or months.

Your health care provider might prescribe the antidepressant Zyban (bupropion), which also reduces symptoms of nicotine withdrawal.

How long will the effects last?

The effects of nicotine withdrawal are different for each person. In general, the symptoms are worst during the first

few days after quitting use of tobacco. The symptoms gradually get better over the next few weeks or months. Most people no longer feel the effects of withdrawal 6 to 8 weeks after quitting.

What can I do to prevent this from happening to me again or to others?

- Don't start smoking again.
- Join a stop-smoking support group or class.
- Teach your children and friends about the dangers of cigarette smoking.

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