NICOTINE POUCHES: A CLOSER LOOK

WHAT ARE NICOTINE POUCHES?

Nicotine pouches are small, dissolvable pouches containing nicotine along with flavorings and sweeteners.[1] Unlike cigarettes and chewing tobacco, nicotine pouches do not contain tobacco leaves.[2] Instead, they contain nicotine that has been made in a lab or extracted from tobacco. Nicotine, also found in cigarettes and other tobacco products, is highly addictive.[1-3] Nicotine pouches often contain high levels of nicotine, similar to smokeless tobacco products like dip or chew.[1,3]

HOW DO THEY WORK?

Nicotine pouches are placed between your lip and gum.[2] As the pouch dissolves, nicotine is absorbed into the bloodstream through your gums and mouth.[1,2] Unlike using dip/chew, there is no need to spit.[2] While nicotine pouches do not involve burning tobacco, resulting in reduced exposure to harmful chemicals in cigarette smoke, **they still deliver nicotine, a highly addictive substance.**[3]

THE HEALTH RISKS

While nicotine pouches are considered to be less harmful than cigarettes, they still pose significant health risks:

- **Addiction risks:** The levels of nicotine in these pouches are high and very addictive, making it difficult to quit once you start using them.[1,3] People who are addicted to nicotine products like nicotine pouches usually experience nicotine withdrawal symptoms in between episodes of use and when they stop using them altogether.
- **Cardiovascular Risks:** Since the levels of nicotine in nicotine pouches are high, these products can increase heart rate and blood pressure, potentially leading to heart disease and stroke.
- **Unknown Long-Term Effects:** As a relatively new product, the long-term health consequences of nicotine pouch use are not fully understood.
- Nicotine pouches should not be used by children, teenagers, and pregnant women.[1,3]

STOPPING TOBACCO USE

If you have never smoked cigarettes or used products with nicotine, it is safest not to start. There is not enough evidence to support whether these products help people to stop smoking. VA recommends using these treatments to help stop tobacco use:

- **Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT):** Nicotine patches, gum, and lozenges can help manage withdrawal symptoms. NRT differs from nicotine pouches because they are highly regulated and more slowly deliver a safe, standard amount of nicotine that minimizes the risk of addiction. They are designed such that you can decrease the amount of nicotine dose over time and have been proven to be safe by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

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- **Prescription Medications:** Medications like bupropion (under the trade name of Zyban) or varenicline (under the trade name of Chantix) can reduce nicotine cravings and withdrawals to make stopping easier. These medications are also FDA-approved.
- **Behavioral Therapy:** Counseling can provide strategies for coping with cravings and avoiding triggers.

The most effective and safest way to stop smoking is to combine FDA-approved medications with behavioral counseling. This approach will give you the best chance of success to stop smoking. We strongly encourage you to talk with your healthcare provider about the possibility of arranging both medications and behavioral counseling for stopping smoking or other tobacco use.

VA provides many resources to help you stop using tobacco. Consider talking to your healthcare provider about a personalized plan to stop smoking. Here are some helpful VA resources:

- 1-855-QUIT-VET, VA's Free Telephone Quitline: www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/quit-vet.asp
- SmokefreeVET Text Message Service: www.smokefree.gov/VET
- Stay Quit Coach Mobile Application: mobile.va.gov/app/stay-quit-coach
- VA Tobacco and Health Webpage: www.mentalhealth.va.gov/quit-tobacco/

THE BOTTOM LINE

If you would like to stop smoking or other tobacco use, consider stopping completely and becoming nicotine free. There are effective tobacco use treatments available to you in VA, including FDA-approved medications and counseling, that can help you achieve your goals.

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[1] CDC. Nicotine Pouches. 2024. https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/nicotine-pouches/index.html

[2] FDA. Other Tobacco Products FDA. 2024. https://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/products-ingredients-components/other-tobacco-products

[3] FDA. Nicotine is Why Tobacco Products are Addictive. 2024. https://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/health-effects-tobacco-use/nicotine-why-tobacco-products-are-addictive