**Medications Are Effective for Quitting Smoking**

By [Alexandra Sifferlin](http://healthland.time.com/author/asifferlin/)May 31, 2013[0](http://healthland.time.com/2013/05/31/confirmed-licensed-medications-are-effective-for-quitting-smoking/#comments)

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In the U.S., 68.8% of current adult smokers want to quit for good, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Since 2002, the number of former smokers exceeds the number of current smokers in the country, but there’s still work to be done, with 1 in every 5 U.S. deaths credited to tobacco.

It’s a good thing that there are cessation methods that work, according to a recent review of 267 studies involving 101,804 people published in the Cochrane Library. The study offers hope to people who want to kick the habit: it shows currently licensed medications are effective.

Currently there are three medications in the U.S. and Europe that are licensed to help smokers quit. These include nicotine-replacement therapies (NRTs) like nicotine patches, gums and inhalers; the antidepressant drug bupropion; and the drug varenicline. The goals of the medications are to curb the effects of nicotine in the brain.

Russia and other spots in Eastern Europe also have a widely used cessation drug called cytisine that is similar to the drug varenicline.

In the review, researchers looked at the success rates of the cessation medications compared with placebos. They defined success as an individual who stopped smoking for six months or more.

Based on the findings, all the drugs were successful at improving the odds for smokers who wanted to quit. Participants were 80% more likely to quit when using a single NRT or taking bupropion compared with those using a placebo. Those using varenicline as well as an NRT had two to three times greater odds.

Participants taking only varenicline had a 50% greater likelihood of successfully quitting compared with patients taking any NRT, and they experienced similar results to patients taking any combination of two NRTs. Although all the drugs are considered low risk, the researchers say more safety information would be valuable for varenicline.

“This review provides strong evidence that the three main treatments, nicotine-replacement therapy, bupropion and varenicline, can all help people to stop smoking,” said lead researcher Kate Cahill of the Department of Primary Care Health Sciences at the University of Oxford [in a statement](http://www.eurekalert.org/emb_releases/2013-05/w-qsl052813.php). “Although cytisine is not currently licensed for smoking cessation in most of the world, these data suggest it has potential as an effective and affordable therapy.”

The review is encouraging for anyone trying to quit. Even though smoking cessation can be extremely difficult, studies show quitting can [extend lives](http://healthland.time.com/2012/10/29/women-who-give-up-smoking-extend-lives-by-10-years/) by up to 10 years. Other nonmedication methods have also been found to help smokers stay on track to quit for good. For more information on the effects of smoking and how to quit, visit the CDC’s Tips From Former Smokers page [here](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/).