Making a Plan to Quit Smokeless Tobacco

In many ways, quitting smokeless tobacco is a lot like quitting smoking. Both involve tobacco products that contain nicotine, and both involve the physical, mental, and emotional parts of addiction. Many of the ways to handle the mental hurdles of quitting are the same. But for oral tobacco users, there is often a stronger need to have something in the mouth (an oral substitute) to take the place of the chew, snuff, or pouch.

There's no one right way to quit, but there are some that need to done. Key steps for quitting are covered here.

Make the decision to quit using smokeless tobacco

Only you can decide you want to quit using tobacco. Others may want you to quit, but the real commitment must come from you.

Think about why you want to quit.

- Are you worried that you could get a tobacco-related disease[1]?
- Do you really believe that the benefits of quitting outweigh the benefits of continuing to use tobacco?
- Do you know someone who has had health problems because of tobacco use?
- Are you ready to make a serious try at quitting?

Write down your reasons so you can look at them every time you want to chew or dip.

If you're ready to quit, setting a date and deciding on a plan will help move you to the

next step.

Set a quit date and make a plan

What's important about picking a Quit Day?

Once you've decided to quit, you're ready to pick a quit date. This is a key step. One study of smokeless tobacco users who were offered nicotine replacement therapy found that even in those who did not plan to quit, picking a Quit Day and then quitting on that day led to much better success staying quit 6 months later compared to those who gradually reduced their use of tobacco.

Pick a day within the next month as your Quit Day. Picking a date too far away gives you time to change your mind. Still, you need to give yourself enough time to prepare. You might choose a date with a special meaning like a birthday or anniversary, or the date of the American Cancer Society Great American Smokeout Event[2] (the third Thursday in November each year). Or you might want to just pick a random date. Circle the date on your calendar. Make a strong, personal commitment to quit on that day.

How do you plan to quit?

There are many ways to quit smoking tobacco, and some of them may help quit smokeless tobacco, too. Lozenges and the prescription drug varenicline are 2 nicotine replacement therapies that have been shown to help[3]. It's also a good idea to talk to your doctor or dentist, and get their advice and support.

Support should be a key part of your plan. Web-based quit programs, telephone quit lines, Nicotine Anonymous meetings, self-help materials such as books and pamphlets, and quit counselors can be a great help. Also tell your family, friends, and co-workers that you're quitting. They can give you help and encouragement, which increases your chances of quitting for good.

What can I do to increase my chances of quitting?

Studies have found that counseling and other types of emotional support[4] can boost the success rates when quitting smokeless tobacco.

Behavioral and supportive therapies also help the person stay tobacco-free. Talk to a health care provider or contact us to find free telephone-based counseling.

Prepare for your Quit Day

Here are some steps to help you get ready for your Quit Day:

- Pick the date and mark it on your calendar.
- Tell friends and family about your Quit Day.
- Get rid of all the tobacco in your home, car, and at work.
- Stock up on oral substitutes – sugarless gum, carrot sticks, hard candy, and/or cinnamon sticks.
- Decide on a plan. Will you use nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) or other medicines? Will you go to a class or program? If so, sign up now.
- Consider seeing your doctor or dentist. Have them check your mouth, and talk to them about your plan for quitting.
- Set up your support system. This could be a face-to-face group, web-based program, or a friend or family member who has successfully quit and is willing to help you.
- Ask family and friends who use tobacco not to use it around you or leave it out where you can see it.
- If you are using varenicline, take your dose each day leading up to your Quit Day.
- Make a list of your “triggers” – situations, places, or feelings – that make you more likely to use tobacco. Being aware of these can help you avoid them or at least be ready for them.
- Think about your past attempts to quit. Try to figure out what worked and what didn’t.

Successful quitting is a matter of planning and commitment, not luck. Decide now on your own plan. Some options include joining a tobacco cessation class, calling a cessation support line, going to support meetings, using nicotine replacement or other medicines, online support, and using self-help materials such as books and pamphlets. For the best chance of success, your plan should include 2 or more of these options.

Plan for your prescriptions

If you are thinking of using a prescription drug[5], you will need to talk with your doctor about getting it in time for your Quit Day. Talk with your doctor about exactly how to use the medicine and when to start taking it. Put a note on your calendar to remind you when to start taking it.

Cut down on how much you use

One way to cut back before quitting is to cut down on the number of times or the amount you dip or chew each day. By doing this, you slowly reduce the amount of nicotine in your body. Try cutting back to half of your usual amount before you quit. If you usually carry your tin or pouch with you, try leaving it behind. Carry something else to put in your mouth instead.

Cut back on when and where you use

You can also try cutting back on when and where you dip or chew. This gives you a chance to notice when your cravings are the worst. It helps you decide on a game plan if you know what triggers your cravings. Again, once you've decided not to use tobacco at a certain place, leave your pouch or tin at home when you go there. Try your substitutes instead.

Put off using tobacco when you have a craving

Go as long as you can without giving into a craving. Start by trying for at least 10 minutes, then longer and longer as you near your Quit Day. Pick your 3 worst triggers and stop dipping or chewing at those times. This will be hard at first, but practice will make it easier.

Quitting tobacco is a lot like losing weight. **It takes a strong commitment over a long time.** Users may wish there were a magic bullet – a pill or method that would make quitting painless and easy. But there's nothing like that. Nicotine substitutes can help reduce withdrawal symptoms, but they work best when used as part of a quitting plan that addresses the physical, mental, and emotional parts of quitting.

On your Quit Day

Over time, tobacco becomes a strong habit. Daily events, like waking up in the morning, finishing a meal, drinking coffee, or taking a break at work, often trigger your urge to chew or dip. Breaking the link between the trigger and tobacco will help you stop.

On your Quit Day go down this list:

- Do not use tobacco of any kind. This means none at all – not even a pinch!
- Stay busy – try walking, short bursts of exercise, or other activities and hobbies.
- Keep substitutes handy to put in your mouth.
- Drink lots of water and juices.
- Start using nicotine replacement if that's your choice.

- Call a quit support line, go to a quit class, or follow your self-help plan.
- Avoid situations where the urge to dip or chew is strong.
- Avoid people who are using tobacco.
- Drink less alcohol or avoid it completely.
- Think about how you can change your routine. Use a different route to go to work. Drink tea instead of coffee. Eat breakfast in a different place or choose foods and drinks that make tobacco taste bad.

Be prepared to feel the urge to use tobacco. It will pass whether you dip or chew or not. Use the 4 D's to help fight the urge:

- **Delay** for 10 minutes. Repeat if needed.
- **Deep breathe.** Close your eyes, slowly breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- **Drink water** slowly, sip by sip.
- **Do something else.** Some activities trigger cravings. Get up and move around.

Often this simple trick will help you to move beyond the strong urge to use tobacco.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/tobacco-and-cancer/smokeless-tobacco.html
2. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/great-american-smokeout.html
3. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking/nicotine-replacement-therapy.html
4. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking/getting-help-with-the-mental-part-of-tobacco-addiction.html
5. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking/prescription-drugs-to-help-you-quit-smoking.html

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