



How Can I Get Tobacco Treatment Medications?

With smoke-free rules in many public spaces and housing, it can be challenging for people who use tobacco products to manage cravings and withdrawal. When people use tobacco treatment medications, such as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), they are more likely to succeed at being tobacco-free when they need to or want to, whether or not they are ready to quit.

Three forms of NRT (the patch, gum and lozenge) are available over the counter, which means you can buy them in any drug store without a prescription. **But if you have insurance and get a prescription from your health care provider, NRT and other medications like bupropion SR (Zyban or Wellbutrin) and varenicline (Chantix) may be covered at minimal or no cost to you.**

Find out more below about how to get NRT and other tobacco treatment medications based on your insurance coverage.



= Covered



= Not covered



= Coverage varies

If you have New York State (NYS) Medicaid:

Nasal Spray

Varenicline

Bupropion
SR

Inhaler

Lozenge

Gum

Patch

- With a prescription, NYS Medicaid covers all five forms of NRT (patch, gum, lozenge, inhaler and nasal spray) as well as the medications bupropion SR (Zyban or Wellbutrin) and varenicline (Chantix).
- NYS Medicaid does not put any limits on the number of prescriptions covered and requires no prior approval.
- NYS Medicaid also covers multiple forms of NRT or tobacco treatment medications simultaneously. This means, for example, you can ask your health care provider to prescribe both a long-acting NRT (patch) and a short-acting NRT (gum, lozenge, nasal spray or inhaler) and Medicaid will cover both. You can also ask for prescriptions for both NRT and bupropion SR, and Medicaid will cover both.

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If you have Medicare:

Nasal Spray

Varenicline

Bupropion
SR

Inhaler

Lozenge

Gum

Patch

- With a prescription, Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage (Part C) prescription drug plans cover the nicotine nasal spray, nicotine inhaler, bupropion SR (Zyban or Wellbutrin) and varenicline (Chantix).
- Medicare does not cover NRT that is available over the counter (patch, gum and lozenge), even with a prescription.

If you have a private insurance plan

Nasal Spray

Varenicline

Bupropion
SR

Inhaler

Lozenge

Gum

Patch

(including plans you get through your employer)

- NYS law requires health insurance plans to provide coverage for all types of NRT and other tobacco treatment medications that are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). However, some plans are exempt from this requirement, so it's important to contact your insurance company directly (call the number on the back of your insurance card) and find out what it covers. Ask these questions to find out what is covered:
 - What tobacco treatment medications are covered by my insurance plan? (Ask about each medication individually.)
 - Are there requirements for that medication coverage? (Requirements may include prior approval or documentation from your health care provider that you have tried and failed another medication in the past.)
 - Is the cost of the medication completely covered, or am I required to pay part of it? What about a copayment?

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Common Questions

How do I get a prescription for NRT or other tobacco treatment medications?

- Talk to your health care provider and explain you are interested in trying any of the medications mentioned above.
- **Share the letter** with your health care provider. It has important information about NRT, including that it is safe to use NRT while smoking.

How do I know which NRT or medication I want to try?

Visit nyc.gov/health and search for **Be Free With NRT** to find more information, including:

- A **pocket guide** that explains how to use each type of medication, pros and cons about each medication and answers to common questions
- A **video** about the benefits of NRT and how to use different types of medication

What if I do not have insurance and I want to try NRT?

- Contact the NYS Smokers' Quitline to talk to a quit coach and learn if you are eligible for a free starter kit of NRT.
 - Visit nysmokefree.com or call 866-NY-QUITS (866-697-8487).
- Visit nyc.gov/health/map to find local quit-smoking programs that offer free medications near you.
- If you need help signing up for health insurance, including Medicaid, free in-person assistance is available:
 - Call **311** or visit nyc.gov/health and search for **health insurance** to connect with an enroller.

**Share this letter with your
health care provider to get a
prescription for NRT or other
tobacco treatment medications.**





**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**

Ashwin Vasan, MD, PhD

Commissioner

February 2023

Dear Colleagues,

As health care providers, we know that helping patients address tobacco use is one of the most important things we can do to help them improve their health. However, many patients need more than just advice. Tobacco use treatment can provide patients with support and the ability to manage the discomfort of withdrawal, whether they are ready to quit or need help managing smoke-free spaces, like a residential building or workspace. Advice coupled with treatment — both long-acting medications (such as bupropion SR or nicotine patch) and short-acting medications (such as nicotine gum, lozenge, nasal spray or inhaler) to address immediate cravings — can provide critical support in any of these scenarios.

Recent coverage changes by the NYS Medicaid Fee-for-Service (FFS) and all 18 Managed Care Organizations (MCOs), as well as medication guidance changes by the FDA, make it easier to prescribe these safe and effective regimens for your patients:

- NYS Medicaid removed the two-course annual limit for smoking cessation medications. This includes all seven FDA-approved tobacco use medications as well as combinations of medications, such as long- and short-acting medications.
- NYS Medicaid removed prior authorization for prescribing tobacco use medications (except for brand-name products when generics are available).
- The FDA approved removal of the warning about using two forms of nicotine-containing products simultaneously, indicating there are no significant safety concerns with prescribing combination nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) or the use of NRT with another nicotine-containing product, such as tobacco.
- The FDA approved the removal of the guidance to limit NRT use to eight to 12 weeks and the boxed warning about potential neuropsychiatric side effects for both varenicline and bupropion SR when used for smoking cessation.

Smoking rates have significantly decreased over the last two decades, but we still have work to do. Tobacco use continues to be a leading cause of preventable morbidity and mortality, and smoking increases the risk of severe illness from COVID-19. The recently expanded Medicaid benefit for medication and updated FDA guidance provide a great opportunity to address tobacco use with your patients. For more information, visit nyc.gov/health and search for **Be Free With NRT**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ashwin Vasan'.

Ashwin Vasan, MD, PhD
Commissioner

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene