

# Supporting Your Patients Who Smoke or Vape

## A Coaching Guide

Instructions and suggested language to help you engage and counsel patients on tobacco use treatment





# 1 Ask

Ask patients about their smoking or vaping during every visit.

“Do you smoke? What about vaping (using e-cigarettes) or smoking hookah? Have you smoked in the past?”

“Tell me a little about your smoking. Has anything changed since your last visit?”

## Assess your patients’ smoking patterns.

These questions can help you assess your patients’ nicotine dependence and determine dosing of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). Review the **Tobacco Treatment Medication Prescribing Chart** for detailed dosing information:

“How many cigarettes do you smoke per day?”

- “One to 10.”
- “More than 10.”
- “I do not smoke every day.”

“How soon after waking up do you smoke your first cigarette?”

- “Thirty minutes or less.”
- “More than 30 minutes.”
- “I do not smoke every day.”

## Assess your patients’ readiness to change.

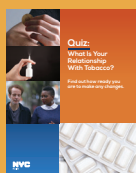
Ask an open-ended question to start assessing your patients’ readiness and motivation to make a change.

“What are your thoughts on changing or cutting back on your smoking?”

These questions will help assess nicotine intake and dependence to guide dosing of NRT. Note that menthol cigarette use may affect nicotine dependence and make it harder to reduce use.

You can use similar questions for patients who vape:

- When assessing vaping patterns, try to gauge how much someone vapes by asking which products they use and how long they last (such as whether a cartridge, pod or disposable device lasts them more or less than two days).
- Similar to smoking, ask how soon after waking up they first vape.



Consider using the **What Is Your Relationship With Tobacco? Quiz** to help assess your patients’ readiness: not ready or interested, thinking about it, preparing for it, taking action or maintaining change.

## 2 Assist

### Assist your patients by providing counseling and medications to help them reach their goals.

Use motivational interviewing approaches to understand and clarify your patients' goals.

- Ask open-ended questions.

**“When does smoking prevent you from doing other things you want to do, such as work, school or other activities that are important to you?”**

- Explore discrepancies between goals and current behaviors.

**“It sounds like avoiding smoking at home is really important to you to protect your family, but it is hard and can be uncomfortable. Can I share some options with you that might help?”**

- Express empathy through reflective listening.

**“It sounds like trying to cut back on vaping has been really challenging.”**

- Support your patients' self-efficacy. Encourage them to be optimistic.

**“You did really well last time. You made it one week without smoking!”**



Discuss with your patients how tobacco treatment medications can help them reach their goals, whether they need support to avoid smoking in specific situations, reduce their use, quit or avoid a relapse.

- Based on your patients’ goals, share how tobacco treatment medications can help them manage withdrawal symptoms, such as cravings, irritability, frustration or anger, anxiety, trouble concentrating, increased appetite, restlessness, depressed mood, and trouble sleeping.

**“Using tobacco treatment medications can help you avoid nicotine withdrawal symptoms and stay comfortable when you are not smoking.”**

**“What do you think? Would you like to learn more or try any of the medications we discussed?”**

- Share **How To Use Tobacco Treatment Medications: A Pocket Guide** with your patients to help them consider medication options.

If your patient is interested in treatment or changing their smoking, provide medications, guidance and counseling to help them reach their goals.



- Review lessons learned with your patient from any previous attempts to stop or reduce their smoking, including issues with medications, cravings and triggers.
- If your patient is using any type of NRT, discuss how to interpret symptoms and adjust their use. The following table may help:

Symptoms	Action
<p><b>Strong tobacco cravings, irritability or anxiety, trouble concentrating, or insomnia</b></p>	<p>Your patient is likely getting too little nicotine and can try using a short-acting NRT more frequently. If symptoms persist, consider increasing your patient’s dose.</p>
<p><b>Fast heartbeat, headache, upset stomach, dizziness or nausea (similar to when they smoked their first cigarette)</b></p>	<p>Your patient is likely getting too much nicotine and can skip some doses of a short-acting NRT or take it less frequently. If symptoms persist, your patient should discuss decreasing their dose with you and stop taking NRT.</p>

- Discuss anticipated challenges and think of potential strategies with your patients. The following table may help:

Issues To Explore	Strategies
<p><b>Being around people who smoke or vape</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell loved ones you are making a change and ask for their support.</li> <li>• Ask friends or family members who smoke, especially if they live with you, if they would like to change their smoking too.</li> <li>• Avoid taking breaks at work or school with others who smoke or vape. Take a break at a different time or a walk outside instead.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Places and situations that make you want to smoke or vape</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid stores where you usually buy cigarettes or vapes. Try taking different routes so you do not have to pass those stores.</li> <li>• If you usually smoke or vape at home, try changing where you sit or rearranging the room to help break the routine.</li> <li>• If you usually smoke or vape while walking outside, during work breaks, or at specific times of the day, try changing your routine (such as taking a different route or break at a different time) or using a distraction technique (such as focusing on your breathing, doodling or coloring, or counting things around you).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Drinks or food that make you want to smoke or vape</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you drink coffee, hold your cup in the hand you usually hold your cigarette or vape in, or switch to tea or another drink.</li> <li>• Try avoiding alcohol the first few weeks you are changing your smoking or vaping. If you are at a place that serves alcohol, try drinking seltzer, juice or something else instead.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Feelings that make you want to smoke or vape</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety, irritability, restlessness and cravings are all nicotine withdrawal symptoms, so using a short-acting NRT, such as nicotine lozenges or a nicotine inhaler, may help. Reducing your caffeine intake can also help with some of these symptoms. Cutting back on smoking affects how your body processes caffeine, so the same amount of caffeine will have a larger effect.</li> <li>• If you are feeling anxious or irritable, physical activity (such as taking a walk, going outside, deep breathing or meditation) can help.</li> <li>• If you are feeling restless or having trouble concentrating, distract yourself with a simple task. For example, eat a healthy snack, chew gum, drink water, talk to a friend or take a walk.</li> </ul>

# 3 Follow Up

## Following up with your patients is critical, regardless of their goals or initial dosing.

Follow up within one to two weeks of prescribing treatment.

- Ask your patients if they had issues filling their prescription and how the medication is working. Provide encouragement and support as needed.

**“How is it going? Were you able to fill the prescription for the nicotine patches and lozenges?”**

**“Did you try the nicotine lozenges yet? How did you feel?”**

**“You are doing a great job. I can tell how important this is to you.”**

- Refer patients to the New York State Smokers’ Quitline at 866-NY-QUITS (866-697-8487) for additional no-cost coaching and support between visits.
  - Patients whose preferred language is Chinese (800-838-8917), Korean (800-556-5564) or Vietnamese (800-778-8440) can call the Asian Smokers’ Quitline or visit **[asiansmokersquitline.org](http://asiansmokersquitline.org)**.

Six weeks after prescribing treatment, assess progress.

- Assess your patients’ medication use and the effectiveness of the medication. Modify or refill the prescription as needed.

**“How has it been going? Have you been able to avoid smoking at work with the patches and lozenges?”**

**“Have you been able to cut back on smoking as much as you wanted by now? Do you still think you can stop smoking completely next month like we talked about?”**

**“It sounds like you are still having cravings and need a little more nicotine to stay comfortable. We can adjust the dose today.”**

- Continue to provide additional supportive counseling and follow-up.

For more information as well as resources and clinical tools to support your patients who smoke or vape, visit [nyc.gov/health](https://nyc.gov/health) and search for **tobacco treatment**.

