

UW-CTRI News Release

Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention, UW School of Medicine and Public Health

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Wisconsin Researchers Find Combining Stop-Smoking Medications is Best Bet for Quitting

Researchers at the University of Wisconsin Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention (UW-CTRI) have found that combining an over-the-counter nicotine-replacement patch with the nicotine-replacement lozenge is the best bet for smokers trying to quit.

The findings are published in the November issue of the Archives of General Psychiatry, a sister publication to the well-regarded Journal of the American Medical Association. The article details the largest study to date comparing tobacco-dependence treatments head-to-head.

The study compared the following:

- nicotine patch
- nicotine lozenge
- bupropion, a prescription medication
- nicotine lozenge and patch combined
- nicotine lozenge and bupropion combined
- placebo

The study also found that using any of the medications was more effective than using a placebo.

“We know that most smokers want to quit. Many have tried,” said Dr. Megan Piper, author of the article in the scientific journal and a researcher at UW-CTRI. “Many of the smokers who try, though, try ‘cold turkey,’ the least effective way to go about it with only a five percent or less success rate. Our findings offer a scientifically validated option. Forty percent of smokers who

received the combination of the nicotine patch and the nicotine lozenge were able to achieve long-term abstinence. This treatment provided a two-fold better outcome for quitting success than did the placebo.”

“This is an important study that shows that people may derive greater benefit from a combination of treatments in their efforts to quit smoking,” Dr. Nora Volkow said. She is the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, one of the funders of the study along with the National Cancer Institute (NCI). Both are housed within the National Institutes of Health.

“More research is needed to determine whether other therapy combinations can further improve cessation outcomes,” Volkow said.

More than 1,500 Wisconsin smokers participated in the study. They received medication for either eight or 12 weeks along with six sessions of individual counseling.

“This study highlights the importance of providing effective treatment – medication combined with counseling – to all smokers who want to quit,” said Dr. Robert Croyle, director of NCI’s Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences. “We’ve known for some time that the nicotine patch can help smokers quit, but these new data should encourage smokers to consider using the nicotine lozenge together with the patch to increase their likelihood of success.”

There are seven FDA-approved medications to treat tobacco dependence. The UW-CTRI study tested or examined three of the medications. It did not look nicotine-replacement nasal spray, inhaler or gum. The final FDA-approved medication, varenicline, was not approved at the time the study began. Researchers believe their comparative study design model could next be used to assess further treatment options that are approved by the FDA.

UW-CTRI is a nationally recognized research center founded in 1992 and is committed to determining the nature of tobacco dependence and developing evidence-based treatments to assist smokers. For more information, visit www.ctri.wisc.edu. The Center is a part of the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health.

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