

# Treating tobacco dependency with **varenicline**

**Information for patients**



# What is varenicline?

Varenicline is a tablet that does not contain nicotine and is available on prescription. It has been shown to work as well as vapes to help people stop smoking and be a more effective aid than nicotine-replacement gum or patches.

The drug works by reducing cravings for nicotine and blocking its effect on the brain, while also helping with withdrawal symptoms such as feeling irritable or having difficulty sleeping.

When used alongside behavioural support, such as counselling, the treatment has been shown to help around one in four people to stop smoking for at least six months.

## How does it work?

It works by reducing the urge to smoke and helping to relieve withdrawal symptoms associated with stopping smoking.

It is a prescription-only medicine; therefore, you will need to seek advice from your doctor, or stop smoking advisor, who will assess your suitability.

Treatment starts one to two weeks before your target stop date, so you should stop smoking between day eight and 14 of your treatment.

In the first eight days of treatment, your dosage will increase gradually. Varenicline is usually prescribed in the following way:

| Day  | Dose              |
|--|-------------------|
| 1-3  | 0.5mg daily       |
| 4-7  | 0.5mg twice daily |
| 8 until the end of treatment<br>(total 12 weeks) | 1mg twice daily   |

### **You will not be able to use varenicline if you are:**

- Under 18.
- Pregnant.
- Currently breastfeeding.
- Have severe kidney problems.
- Are allergic to any varenicline ingredients.

Your doctor will need to weigh up the pros and cons of using varenicline if you have certain medical conditions.

# Drug interactions

To date there are no known reports of drug interactions with varenicline, but stopping smoking can affect certain drugs. Please read the patient information leaflet provided with varenicline.

## Side-effects

If you have kidney problems or experience side-effects, your doctor may advise you to reduce your dose. Please inform your GP or stop smoking advisor if you experience any side effects.

## Common side effects include:

- **Nausea, which may be reduced if varenicline is taken whole with water and food.**
- **Headache.**
- **Sleep disturbances, which may be reduced if varenicline is taken in the early evening rather than night-time.**
- **Dry mouth.**
- **Dizziness/sleepiness – you should not drive or operate machinery if you are affected.**
- **Fatigue.**
- **Indigestion.**
- **Vomiting.**
- **Changes in taste.**
- **Constipation.**

For a full list of side effects please read the patient information leaflet provided with varenicline.

Some of these side effects can also be caused by stopping smoking and therefore may be an indirect result of taking varenicline.

It is possible that three out of 100 people will experience increase in urges to smoke, irritability, depression and/or sleep problems after stopping varenicline. In this case you may wish to reduce your dose gradually before stopping treatment.

**Varenicline can make stopping smoking easier, but you will still need a lot of determination and willpower.**

**For more information and advice on stopping smoking, please contact the Tobacco Dependency Team on 01623 622515, extension 6066.**

## **Further sources of information**

NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk/conditions](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions)

Our website: [www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk)

## **Patient Experience Team (PET)**

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

**King's Mill Hospital:** 01623 672222

**Newark Hospital:** 01636 685692

**Email:** [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net)

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net).

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. If you require a full list of references (if relevant) for this leaflet, please email

[sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net)  
or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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