

Chantix (varenicline)

Chantix is a medication for smoking cessation. It is approximately twice as effective as other available medications (such as wellbutrin, nicotine replacement patches). You should set a quit date and start Chantix one week before quitting. You will get the best results by taking it for at least 6 months after you stop smoking; taking it for a year will give you an even better chance of staying off nicotine.

It is not a controlled substance and has no abuse potential.

Cost

Your insurance may or may not cover this medication. It is available only as a brand (it may become generic in 2018). Price varies depending on pharmacy, but a month-long course costs around \$130.00.

Mechanism

- 1) It is a partial agonist at nicotinic receptors, mimicking the effects of nicotine in the brain.
- 2) Blocks nicotine from binding to these receptors, thereby decreasing the reinforcing effect of smoking.

Dosing

Supplied as 0.5 mg white tablet and 1 mg light blue tablet.

Best to take it after eating and with a full glass of water.

Side Effects

Nausea (30%-40% of patients), insomnia, constipation, gas. Side effects (especially nausea, headache, vomiting, and dizziness) can be worse if taken with a nicotine replacement therapy or with cigarettes.

There have been rare reports of mood worsening, or suicidal thoughts, on Chantix; these events are so rare that it is hard to know their exact frequency (possibly 1 in 1,000). Still, many people with mood disorders have taken Chantix without developing mood problems on it, and the risks of continued smoking are far greater than the risks of problems with Chantix.

Chantix may increase the risk of heart attacks and irregular heart rhythms. It is important to understand that continued use of nicotine brings similar or greater risks to the heart.

–Updated 7/27/2012 by Chris Aiken, MD