



Over-the-Counter Medication: Nicotine Patch (NicoDerm®CQ®, Nicotrol®, Habitrol®)



Nicotine Patch

Type: Long-acting medicine
Brands: NicoDerm®CQ®, Nicotrol®, Habitrol® and generics
Cost: About \$2-4 per day, \$60-120 per 30 days

How does the nicotine patch work?

- The nicotine patch is a small, self-adhesive patch that delivers a measured dose of nicotine through the skin.
- The nicotine patch helps users stop smoking by taking the edge off cigarette cravings without providing the other harmful substances found in cigarettes.
- Different types and strengths of nicotine patches are available. Depending on the type, the patch can be used for 16 to 24 hours.
- For the first several weeks, a full-strength patch is typically recommended. Users then switch to a lower-dose patch for the next couple of weeks.
- The FDA recommends using the patch for three to five months. A health care provider may suggest shorter or longer treatments for individuals based on need. Follow his or her instructions.

What are the directions for use?

- Once a day, usually the morning, apply the patch to a clean, dry, hairless area of skin on the upper chest, upper arm or hip. Avoid areas of irritated, oily, scarred or broken skin.
- With the sticky side to the skin, press the patch in place for about 10 seconds. Be sure the patch is firmly in place, especially around the edges. Rinse hands with water only after applying the patch.
- If the patch falls off or loosens, replace it with a new one.
- Do not wear more than one patch at a time.
- Users can wear the patch while bathing.
- When removing the patch, fold it in half with the

sticky sides touching and throw away. Apply the next patch to a different skin area to prevent skin irritation.

- Do not smoke during use.

What are the advantages?

- The nicotine patch is used only once a day and is available over the counter.
- Twenty-four hour patches can help users with early morning nicotine withdrawal symptoms.

What are the disadvantages?

- This medication does not get rid of symptoms right away.
- Sixteen-hour patches may not help with early morning symptoms

What are the side-effects?

- Some users have experienced skin irritation (which may improve by removing the patch at bedtime or by trying a different brand), difficulty falling asleep, abnormal dreams, rapid heart rate and dizziness.

What precautions are associated with the patch?

- Users should take extra caution when using the nicotine patch within six weeks of having a heart attack.
- The FDA classified the nicotine patch as a category "D" drug (high risk to the fetus) for use during pregnancy. Pregnant women who smoke should discuss using the patch with their health care provider.
- Nausea, headache, vomiting, dizziness, upset stomach and fatigue may be more common when using the varenicline (Chantix®) and the nicotine patch together.

These are a few of the most common side-effects and interactions. If you have questions or have problems when using this medicine, contact your doctor/pharmacist.

Adapted from the Asthma and COPD Center at the University of Chicago, and from Pharmacological Product Guide: FDA-Approved Medications, The Regents of the University of California, August 2009.