



Prescription Only Medication: Varenicline (Chantix®)



Varenicline

Type: Long-acting medicine
Brand: Chantix®, no generics
Cost: About \$5 per day, \$150 per month

How does varenicline work?

- Varenicline is a prescription medication that interferes with nicotine receptors in the brain to reduce the pleasurable physical effects of smoking and the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal.
- The recommended period for use is six months to reduce risk of relapse, beginning one to two weeks before the quit date. Your health care provider may suggest shorter or longer treatments for you. Follow his or her instructions.
- This medication requires a few days of use before achieving steady blood levels.

What are the directions for use?

- For the first three days of therapy, take a 0.5mg tablet at breakfast.
- For days four through seven, take two 0.5mg tablets, one at breakfast and one at dinner.
- Beginning on day eight, take 1mg twice daily.
- Take varenicline with a full glass of water after a meal.
- An interval of at least six hours between daily doses is recommended.

What are the advantages?

- Varenicline is easy to use and does not contain nicotine.

What are the disadvantages?

- Varenicline requires a prescription.

What are the side-effects?

- Some users have experienced nausea, abnormal dreams, constipation, vomiting, gas, dry mouth and changes in taste.

Are there any precautions for users?

- Though rare, changes in behavior, hostility, depression, suicidal thoughts and attempted suicide have been reported with the use of varenicline.*
- People with severe kidney problems should talk to their health care providers about using of varenicline.
- The FDA classified varenicline as a category "C" drug (possibly unsafe) for use during pregnancy. Pregnant women who smoke should discuss using varenicline with their health care providers.
- Nausea, headache, vomiting, dizziness, upset stomach and fatigue may be more common when varenicline and the nicotine patch are used together.

**In July 2009, the FDA mandated that prescribing information for all varenicline-containing products include a black-boxed warning highlighting the risk of serious neuropsychiatric symptoms.*

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