

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR STAFF HEALTH NURSES

Why do we provide NRT (patch) for eight weeks?

The Cochrane review of Nicotine Replacement Therapy for smoking cessation reports that eight weeks of patch therapy is as effective as longer courses, and that there is no evidence that tapered therapy is better than abrupt withdrawal.

What to do if the employee has contraindications and/or precautions?

NRT is safe for most people to use, although some people may have contraindications and/or precautions that need to be considered. If an employee identifies with any contraindications or precautions (as listed on staff assessment form; Appendix One), they will need to seek medical advice and attach a letter of support from their doctor to the Staff Assessment Form before NRT is to be supplied.

Employee is on medications?

Some medications could interact with NRT. Refer to the Drug Interactions Information Sheet (Appendix Five). If the employee is on any of the medications listed and notices a change in the effectiveness of their medication, they are advised to see a GP.

Employee has a skin reaction?

The employee may experience some mild itching or burning when first applying the patch but this should subside within an hour. Employees who have redness appearing at patch site after removal should find this subsides within 24-hours. If burning or redness persist for longer or becomes intolerable, the patch is to be removed and medical advice sought before continuing with NRT patches. Patches need to be applied to clean, dry, smooth skin on the arm or upper body in the evening. A different site should be chosen each day to avoid skin irritations.

Employee has sleep disturbances?

Employees may experience some mild insomnia initially or occasional vivid dreams but this can occur when giving up smoking with or without NRT. If this occurs, solutions could range from varying the time that the patch is applied so that it better suits the staff member, contacting the Quitline for advice, or if severe, discontinue use of patches and contact a GP.

Employee is allergic to NRT patches?

Allergic reactions to NRT patches are not common. However, if the employee has a reaction, they may be offered either an alternate brand of patch, if this can be supplied through pharmacy, or lozenges (free of charge for eight weeks).

Employee is suffering nicotine withdrawal symptoms?

Some individuals may be highly dependent on nicotine and suffer from nicotine withdrawal symptoms, even though they are using a patch. In these cases the employee may need combination therapy, such as using gum or lozenge or double patching. This is at the discretion of the individual employee or on advice of their medical practitioner.

Symptoms of nicotine withdrawal

Withdrawal from nicotine consists of the presence of cravings to smoke plus four or more of the following symptoms. If they continue to have these symptoms while using the patch, chances are they are not getting enough nicotine. Symptoms of nicotine withdrawal may include anxiety, restlessness, difficulty concentrating, irritability, frustration or anger, depressed mood, increased appetite, insomnia and decreased heart rate.