



Gloucestershire Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Varenicline

What is Varenicline?

Varenicline (Champix©) is a medicine that helps people stop smoking. It works by reducing the urge to smoke and easing withdrawal symptoms associated with smoking. It can also reduce the enjoyment of tobacco if you do smoke when taking the medicine.

How should I take varenicline?

Varenicline is a prescription-only medication (POM). As a result, you will need to ask your doctor or GP to assess if it is suitable for you.

- The tablets should be swallowed with water and do not need to be taken with food.
- The tablets should not be chewed or broken before swallowing.
- The tablets are most effective if taken at the same time each day. This will also help you to remember to take the tablets regularly.
- Treatment with varenicline will start one to two weeks before your target date to quit smoking.
- The medicine will increase gradually during the first eight days of your treatment.
- Most people stop smoking between days eight and fourteen after they have started taking varenicline.
- Take Varenicline as instructed.

Varenicline Dosing

Day	Dose
1 to 3	0.5mg once daily
4 to 7	0.5mg twice daily
8 to end of treatment (total 12 weeks)	1mg twice daily

The recommended course of treatment is 12 weeks. For people who have successfully stopped smoking at the end of 12 weeks, an additional course of 12 weeks of treatment with varenicline may be considered. The dose is usually 1 mg twice daily may be considered by your doctor to help maintain not smoking.

Common side effects of varenicline

- **Stomach upset** such as feeling bloated, indigestion, nausea or vomiting. If you experience nausea or vomiting, take the medicine with food.
- **Constipation or diarrhoea**
- **Headache.** We would advise you to drink plenty of water while taking this medicine.
- **Fatigue, sleepiness, sleep disturbance or abnormal dreams.** If you experience abnormal dreams, avoid taking the last dose near bedtime.
- **Dry mouth or changes in taste.**

- **Dizziness.** You should not drive or operate complex machinery.

If you have kidney problems or notice any other side effects, your doctor or GP may lower your dose. If you notice any other symptoms that you think may be caused by this medicine, speak with your doctor or GP for further advice.

Taking varenicline with other medications

Varenicline does not usually have an effect on any other medicines. However, when you stop smoking, with or without varenicline, your doctor may need to change your dose of medicines such as:

- Theophylline or Aminophylline, medicines for breathing problems.
- Erlotinib, a medicine to treat cancer.
- Riociguat, a medicine to treat high blood pressure in the lungs (pulmonary arterial hypertension).
- Warfarin, a medicine to reduce blood clotting.
- Insulin, to treat diabetes.
- Olanzapine and Clozapine, used to treat psychosis.

It is important to inform your doctor or GP of all the medications you are taking.

If you forget to take varenicline

Avoid taking a double dose to make up for a forgotten tablet. If you forget to take a dose, take it as soon as you remember. If it is within 3 hours before your next dose, do not take the missed tablet.

Getting the most from your treatment

Getting advice and support is important when you are trying to stop smoking. It is important not to miss any scheduled appointments to ensure you are getting the support you need.

After the recommended 12-week treatment, Varenicline can be stopped without tapering the dose. However, your doctor may tell you to slowly lower your dose over a week before you stop taking the medicine completely. This is because a few people have had problems when they suddenly stopped taking varenicline, such as wanting to smoke again, feeling sad or irritated and having trouble sleeping.

These problems are not common, but slowly reducing the medicine can help prevent them. A reducing dose may be considered in these people for a week or so following the recommended 12-week treatment.

You cannot use varenicline if you are:

- Under 18 years old.
- Pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Have severe kidney problems.
- Allergic to any varenicline ingredients.

Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.

Ask 3 Questions

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation.

***Ask 3 Questions** is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial.

Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;84: 379-85



<https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>



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