

## Summary

Smoking is harmful to our health. It causes cancer, lung disease and heart disease. People with mental health problems die 15 to 20 years earlier than others in the UK. The main reason for this is smoking.

Quitting smoking is the single most important way to improve your health and wellbeing.

Using a smoking cessation medication such as varenicline and behavioural support is the best way to quit smoking.

This leaflet contains information about Varenicline.

## For more information

Speak to staff in your care team or ask to see a smoking cessation specialist.

Our email and webpage are here:  
[smokefreeready@slam.nhs.uk](mailto:smokefreeready@slam.nhs.uk)  
[www.slam.nhs.uk/smokefree](http://www.slam.nhs.uk/smokefree)

## Why are we smoke free?

South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust has a duty to promote health and wellbeing.

Smoking is the biggest preventable cause of early death.

We also have to comply with the Health Act (2006) and with NICE guidance on smoking (2013).

Our staff have been trained to deliver the best treatments for managing nicotine dependence.

Being smoke free means all patients benefit from improved health and wellbeing. Anyone who stops smoking might find that their medication works better and they can reduce their dose.

---

Ask if you need a large print, audio, Braille or translated version of this leaflet.

---

Publication date: October 2018  
 Review date: October 2021

[www.slam.nhs.uk](http://www.slam.nhs.uk)

**Stop smoking  
medication**

## Varenicline



[www.slam.nhs.uk/smokefree](http://www.slam.nhs.uk/smokefree)

## What is varenicline?

Varenicline is a medication that acts on the same parts of your brain as nicotine.

It should reduce your craving to smoke and help relieve some unpleasant symptoms when you stop smoking.

Varenicline can also make smoking less enjoyable.

## Is Varenicline safe?

Most smokers are able to take varenicline safely.

It is not suitable if you are under 18, pregnant or breastfeeding.

You should also avoid varenicline if you have unstable epilepsy or end-stage renal disease.

Varenicline is not affected by other medications you might be taking.

## Can you smoke or use e-cigarettes while taking varenicline?

It is safe to smoke or use electronic cigarettes while taking varenicline, but you should set a quit date one or two weeks after you start this medication.

## What are the side-effects?

Common side-effects of varenicline are nausea, headaches, and vivid dreams.

Varenicline has been linked with low mood, depression and suicidal thoughts.

For this reason, it had a caution label and was not considered suitable for people with mental health problems.

However, recent research has indicated this concern is not justified.

The caution label has now been removed and varenicline can be offered to all smokers.

Careful monitoring of mood and adjustment of the dose can safely manage any side effects.



## What else should you know about varenicline?

To help avoid nausea, take varenicline with food and a full glass of water.

To help avoid disturbed sleep, take varenicline before 6pm.

## How do you use varenicline?

Varenicline is taken in tablet form.

For the first three days you take one white 0.5mg tablet.

On days four to seven you take two white 0.5mg tablets each day at least eight hours apart.

From day eight you take two blue 1mg tablets twice daily, eight hours apart.

You can continue to smoke for the first week while the tablets start to work.

If you are in a smoke free environment you should use an NRT patch during the first week.

After taking varenicline for a few days you may notice that you don't enjoy your cigarettes as much as before.

## How long should you use varenicline for?

Most smokers use varenicline for 12 weeks. If you do not feel ready to stop at that point you can ask to take it for another 12 weeks.