

# Varenicline (Chantix)

Varenicline (Chantix) is a medication that can help you stop smoking. It does this by activating the nicotine receptor, which reduces withdrawal problems, and partially blocking that receptor so that cigarettes are no longer rewarding. It is about twice as effective as other available medications (such as wellbutrin, nicotine replacement patches). It also helps people lower their alcohol use.

When starting varenicline, set a quit date about 1-2 weeks after starting it. You will get the best results by taking it for at least 6 months after you stop smoking. Taking it for a year will give you an even better chance of staying off nicotine.

Varenicline is not a controlled substance and has no addictive potential.

## How it works

- 1) Varenicline is a partial agonist at nicotinic receptors, mimicking the effects of nicotine in the brain.
- 2) It nicotine from binding to these receptors, thereby decreasing the reinforcing effect of smoking.

## Dosing

Supplied as 0.5 mg white tablet and 1 mg light blue tablet. Best to take it after eating and with a full glass of water.

## Side Effects

Nausea (30%-40% of patients), insomnia, constipation, gas. Side effects (especially nausea, headache, vomiting, and dizziness) can be

worse if taken with a nicotine replacement therapy or with cigarettes.

There have been rare reports of mood worsening, or suicidal thoughts, on varenicline; these events are so rare that it is hard to know their exact frequency (possibly 1 in 1,000). Still, many people with mood disorders have taken varenicline without developing mood problems on it, and the risks of continued smoking are far greater than the risks of problems with varenicline.

Varenicline may increase the risk of heart attacks and irregular heart rhythms. It is important to understand that continued use of nicotine brings similar or greater risks to the heart.

## Cost

Although varenicline is generic, your insurance may not cover this medication. If you are paying out of pocket you will find the best local price at GoodRx.com.

*–Updated 6/25/2025 by Chris Aiken, MD*