

# Cell Phone Text Messages Aid in Smoking Cessation

*Sample message: "TODAY is the start of being QUIT forever, you can do it! [sic]"*

Cell phones — now in the hands of more than two thirds of the world's population — potentially can help change patients' behavior. In a randomized U.K. study, researchers assessed whether automated cell phone text messages could help people quit smoking.

Investigators enrolled 5800 adult smokers who were willing to make quit attempts; participants received text messages that encouraged smoking cessation (the txt2stop program) or were unrelated to quitting (control). Txt2stop messages were scheduled according to each patient's planned quit date and customized to specific patient characteristics and concerns. Txt2stop patients were able to text "crave" and receive messages to help them resist cravings for cigarettes, or "lapse" to receive messages encouraging them to quit again after relapses. Patients were permitted to use other smoking cessation resources; about half in each group did so.

After 6 months, 11% of txt2stop patients and 5% of controls — a highly significant difference — reported continuous abstinence ( $\leq 5$  cigarettes since quitting) and tested negative for cotinine or carbon monoxide. The results were independent of age, socioeconomic status, and use of other smoking-cessation supports.

**Comment:** The authors will publish cost-effectiveness data separately, but they describe this intervention as technically easy and inexpensive. Uncertainty remains about whether addition of automated text messaging can improve on the best outcomes of programs that use proven measures such as individual and group counseling and pharmacotherapy, which generally are considerably better than those reported here.

— [Bruce Soloway, MD](#)

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