

Extended Treatment with Transdermal Nicotine Is Effective

Abstinence from smoking was more likely with longer use of the patch.

[Current guidelines](#) recommend 8 weeks of transdermal nicotine for patients with tobacco dependence. To assess whether extended use would lead to better outcomes, researchers randomized 568 long-term smokers to transdermal nicotine (21 mg) for 8 weeks (followed by 16 weeks of placebo) or for 24 weeks.

Seven-day abstinence (self-reported, verified by carbon monoxide levels) at 24 weeks was more likely to occur in the extended-treatment group than in the short-term group (32% vs. 20%); similarly, continuous abstinence from the quit date was more likely to occur in the extended-treatment group (19% vs. 13%). However, no differences were noted in 7-day (14%) or continuous abstinence (1%) at 52 weeks.

From weeks 9 to 24 (when one group was receiving placebo), extended treatment lowered relapse incidence (time from the quit date to 7 consecutive days of smoking; hazard ratio, 0.5), lowered risk for lapse (time to any day of smoking; HR, 0.8), and increased speed of recovery from lapse (HR, 1.5).

Comment: For a chronic relapsing condition such as tobacco dependence, we shouldn't be surprised that treatment has an effect only when it is being used. So, how long should transdermal nicotine be continued? This study suggests 24 weeks. The real answer is probably this: as long as it is needed to maintain or support a return to abstinence.

— [Richard Saitz, MD, MPH, FACP, FASAM](#)

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