

# Varenicline Helps Smokeless Tobacco Users to Quit

*More than half of varenicline recipients were abstinent at 12 weeks.*

Use of smokeless tobacco is rising. In several trials, nicotine replacement and bupropion have been ineffective for treatment of patients who use smokeless tobacco. Varenicline (Chantix), a partial agonist of the nicotinic acetylcholine receptor, is effective in helping smokers to quit. In this double-blind randomized trial, industry-sponsored Scandinavian investigators assessed the efficacy of varenicline in helping adult smokeless tobacco users to quit.

At baseline, the 431 participants (mean age, 44; 89% men) reported average use of smokeless tobacco 15 to 16 times daily; average duration of use was longer than 20 years. Participants received varenicline or placebo for 12 weeks. The continuous abstinence rate at weeks 9 through 12 (confirmed by weekly measurement of salivary cotinine levels) was significantly higher in the varenicline group than in the placebo group (59% vs. 39%) for a number needed to treat (NNT) of 5. Continuous abstinence rates were also significantly higher in the long term (weeks 9–26) in the varenicline group than in the placebo group (45% vs. 34%) for an NNT of 9. Notably, few patients in this trial who took varenicline withdrew due to side effects, the most common of which was nausea.

**Comment:** Varenicline is significantly more effective than placebo in helping smokeless tobacco users to quit, at least in the short-to-intermediate term. Note that a U.S. trial is in progress ([CHANCHEW](#)) and that varenicline is not currently FDA-approved for this purpose.

— [Paul S. Mueller, MD, MPH, FACP](#)

Published in [Journal Watch General Medicine](#) January 11, 2011