

Clinical Guidance: Recreational Nicotine is Not Nicotine Replacement Therapy

What are recreational nicotine products?

Recreational nicotine products include e-cigarettes, pouches, toothpicks, tobacco-free dip, lozenges and gum. They are sold in flavors from blueberry to whiskey. These new products deliver nicotine without tobacco. Unfortunately, recreational nicotine products are not closely regulated, including their ingredients and effects on the body. The ingredients and nicotine content are also not always labeled or monitored. In contrast, FDA-approved smoking cessation medications, including nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), have been proven effective for helping people quit smoking. They undergo a rigorous approval process, including clinical trials and are closely monitored and regulated.

Recreational nicotine products are not FDA-approved smoking cessation devices or medications. Many are produced and distributed by the same companies that make and profit from tobacco sales. Current New York State and NYC laws regulate e-cigarette sales but do not regulate the sale of other recreational nicotine products — for those products, price and flavor restrictions do not apply.

Examples of recreational nicotine pouches, lozenges, and gum.

Note that all products have a warning about nicotine content.



Are recreational nicotine products safer than smoking?

The answer to this is still unknown. Smoking kills about 12,000 New Yorkers every year. Recreational nicotine products have not existed long enough for us to know their long-term effects. While they do not expose people to chemicals released by burning tobacco, they each come with their own set of chemical exposures. Exposures are also different for different products. For example, e-cigarettes or vaping products may have an impact on lung health, since they are inhaled. Other

products like nicotine pouches or toothpicks, may have more direct impacts on the mouth and throat.

The safest option for people who need help to cut back on or quit smoking is to use one or more types of FDA-approved NRT medications, which are safe to use even while smoking. Using NRT greatly reduces cravings and doubles the chance of a successful quit attempt, especially when the nicotine patch is used in combination with a short-acting NRT medication (gum, lozenge, nasal spray, or inhaler). Most health insurance plans cover some types of NRT; Medicaid covers all five types.

What are the FDA-approved NRT medications and how can I recognize them?

Over-the-counter (OTC) NRT medications come in three forms: patches, gum and lozenges. Two other forms of NRT are only available with a prescription: nasal spray and inhaler. All OTC forms of NRT include a Drug Facts label on the package with these standard sections:

- **Active Ingredient** (in each dosage unit)
- **Purpose** (stop smoking aid)
- **Uses** (reduces withdrawal symptoms, including nicotine craving, associated with quitting smoking)
- **Warnings**
- **Directions** (dosage, method, and timing of administration)
- **Other Information** (includes storage instructions)
- **Inactive Ingredients** (fillers, stabilizers, flavors, colors, and other ingredients are noted)

Example of NRT nicotine gum packaging. Note the Drug Facts label on the back of the package.



For more information about Drug Facts labels, visit [fda.gov/drugs/resources-you-drugs/over-counter-medicine-label-take-look](https://www.fda.gov/drugs/resources-you-drugs/over-counter-medicine-label-take-look).

Are smoking cessation medications subject to local NYC tobacco laws?

No. Any product that has been approved by the FDA for use as a smoking cessation medication is not considered a tobacco product. Local laws prohibiting the sale of tobacco products to those under the age of 21 **do not apply**.

For more information, visit [nyc.gov/health](https://www.nyc.gov/health) and search for “[tobacco laws](#),” “[quit smoking](#)” or “[vaping](#).”