

Nicotine vaccine under development

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U.S. scientists say new medications might soon be available to help people stop smoking by attacking nicotine addiction in the brain.

Patients in a clinical trial at Massachusetts General Hospital last week received their first doses of an experimental vaccine that keeps most nicotine from entering the brain, The Boston Globe reported.

By late summer, Pfizer Inc. said it expects to begin selling a medication that partially blocks a receptor that seems to be involved in smoking addiction. Another drug under development might "dampen" areas of the

brain involved in craving, thus helping smokers quit without gaining much weight, The Globe said.

"For the first time in 10 years, we have completely new approaches for smoking cessation, and there is hope that the new drugs, because they better target the brain's addiction response, could prove more effective than current treatments," said Dr. Nancy Rigotti, director of the hospital's Tobacco Research and Treatment Center.

The National Institutes of Health says of the 44 million Americans who smoke, about 70 percent want to quit and 40 percent really try. But in a given year, fewer than 5 percent of would-be quitters succeed in kicking the habit.

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