

Nicotine replacement therapy is over-promoted since most ex-smokers quit unassisted

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Health authorities should emphasize the positive message that the most successful method used by most ex-smokers is unassisted cessation, despite the promotion of cessation drugs by pharmaceutical companies and many tobacco control advocates.

The dominant messages about smoking cessation contained in most [tobacco control](#) campaigns, which emphasize that serious attempts at [quitting smoking](#) must be pharmacologically or professionally mediated, are critiqued in an essay in this week's [PLoS Medicine](#) by Simon Chapman and Ross MacKenzie from the School of Public Health at the University of Sydney, Australia.

This overemphasis on quit methods like [nicotine replacement therapy](#) (NRT) has led to the "medicalisation of smoking cessation," despite good evidence that the most successful method used by most ex-smokers is quitting "cold turkey" or reducing-then-quitting. Reviewing 511 studies published in 2007 and 2 008 the authors report that studies repeatedly show that two-thirds to three-quarters of ex-smokers stop unaided and most ex-smokers report that cessation was less difficult than expected.

The medicalisation of smoking cessation is fuelled by the extent and influence of pharmaceutical support for cessation intervention studies, say the authors. They cite a recent review of randomized controlled trials

of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) that found that 51% of industry-funded trials reported significant cessation effects, while only 22% of non-industry trials did. Many assisted cessation studies—but few if any unassisted cessation studies—involve researchers who declare support from a pharmaceutical company manufacturing cessation products.

The authors conclude that "public sector communicators should be encouraged to redress the overwhelming dominance of assisted cessation in public awareness, so that some balance can be restored in smokers' minds regarding the contribution that assisted and unassisted [smoking cessation](#) approaches can make to helping them quit smoking."

More information: Chapman S, MacKenzie R (2010) The Global Research Neglect of Unassisted Smoking Cessation: Causes and Consequences. PLoS Med 7(2): e1000216.
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