

# Smartphone apps to help smokers quit come up short

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Many of the 11 million smokers in the U.S. have downloaded smartphone apps created to help them quit smoking. But since most of these apps don't include practices proven to help smokers quit, they may not be getting the help they need, reports a new study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

"Currently available, popular (most downloaded) smoking cessation apps have low levels of adherence to key evidence-based practices and few apps provide counseling on how to quit, recommend approved [quit smoking](#) medications or refer a user to a quit line," said the study's lead author Lorien C. Abrams, ScD., assistant professor at the George Washington School of Public Health and Health Services.

"Still, there appears to be a high global demand for smoking cessation apps since over 700,000 apps are downloaded each month for the Android operating system alone," he said.

Abrams and his colleagues analyzed popular smoking cessation apps in February 2012. Researchers studied the most popular apps—47 for the iPhone and 51 for the Android operating system—and found that apps for both systems had a low adherence to the U.S. Public Health Service's Clinical Practice Guidelines for Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence.

Michael C. Fiore, M.D., MPH, professor of medicine and director of the Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health pointed out that "even

though the study found that popular smoking cessation apps have a low level of adherence to evidence-based guidelines, it is a hopeful sign that people want to quit and scientists and technicians are coming up with applications to help them. But the bad news is smartphone apps may not give people the guidance they need."

Researchers acknowledge that while they know what helps people quit smoking generally, little is known about what aspects of [smoking cessation](#) programs should be included in [mobile apps](#). Still, Abroms noted that "they [smartphone apps] do not promote aspects of treatments that have proven to work in quitting smoking and so we as [public health](#) professionals have reason to be concerned."

"What we're missing with [smartphone](#) apps is universally recognized, science-based recommendations," said Fiore. "We're obliged to give [smokers](#) the best possible, quality help. Science-based help is what smokers get when they call quit lines—there are over 1,000 quit lines available to U.S. smokers and that's where they can get one-stop help."

**More information:** *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 2011; 40 (3): 279. [DOI: 10.1016/j.amepre.2010.10.032](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2010.10.032)

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