

The controversial stop-smoking drug Champix is safe

May 27 2015, by Kate Bourne

The controversial smoking cessation drug Champix has been linked to suicidal side-effects but, according to a leading Adelaide respiratory researcher, Champix is safe and can improve someone's chances of kicking the habit.

Speaking in the lead up to World No Tobacco Day (Sunday 31 May), Kristin Carson encourages the use of Champix (or Varenicline Tartrate) for smokers admitted into hospital with a [smoking](#)-related illness.

"Smoking accounts for 15% of all deaths, 80% of all lung cancers and is responsible for the greatest disease burden in Australia," says Ms Carson, from The Queen Elizabeth Hospital (Basil Hetzel Institute for Translational Health Research), who has recently completed PhD research into quitting smoking at the University of Adelaide's School of Medicine.

"Champix was made available to Australian smokers in 2008 and has a dual effect – it eases cravings and reduces the 'pleasure' of smoking. However, American studies in 2007 linked Champix to nasty side effects like thoughts of suicide, suicidal behaviour, erratic behaviour and drowsiness.

"In our Adelaide-based study, we found that people who took Champix in conjunction with attending counselling had better control over their cravings and had lower levels of anxiety while quitting, compared to patients who only attended counselling. And, after the 12-week program,

31% of the patients on Champix had quit smoking compared to 21% of the patients who attended counselling only," she says.

Ms Carson says in the study she led, no one experienced suicidal thoughts but there were some side-effects.

"The patients on Champix experienced higher levels of nausea, abnormal dreams, headaches and insomnia than those who didn't take the drug. However, most of these side effects were only experienced by a small number of [patients](#) and no one reported having suicidal thoughts," says Ms Carson.

"It's important that those who are [quitting smoking](#), particularly when they are using medication like Champix, also use counselling. A counsellor, such as those available via Quit SA on the phone, can monitor the patient's symptoms and any [side effects](#), and consulting with a counsellor improves the chances of successfully quitting," she says.

Ms Carson says [smokers](#) looking to quit should weigh up their options and choose a method that's best for them.

"There are lots of options for people who want to quit smoking and the best place to start is cancersa.org.au/quitline. However, for those who are finding it particularly hard to quit, Champix should be considered," says Ms Carson.

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Provided by University of Adelaide

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