Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Varenicline (Systemic

This information from UpToDate® Lexidrug™ explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

Brand Names: US

APO-Varenicline; Chantix; Chantix Continuing Month Pak; Chantix Starting Month Pak

Brand Names: Canada

APO-Varenicline; AURO-Varenicline; Champix Starter Pack [DSC]; Champix [DSC]; MINT-Varenicline; MINT-Varenicline Starter Pack; NRA-Varenicline; TEVA-Varenicline; ZDS-Varenicline

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to help stop smoking.

What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If the patient is a child. Do not give this drug to a child.

This drug may interact with other drugs or health problems.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health

problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Avoid driving and doing other tasks or actions that call for you to be alert until you see how this drug affects you.
- Accidents like car accidents have happened in people taking this drug. Talk with your doctor.
- Do not take this drug for longer than you were told by your doctor.
- Talk with your doctor before you drink alcohol.
- When you stop smoking, other drugs may be affected. Talk with your doctor.
- Talk with your doctor if you have seizures or have ever had seizures.
- You may have signs of nicotine withdrawal when you try to quit smoking even when using drugs like this one to help you quit smoking. There are many signs of nicotine withdrawal. Rarely depression and suicidal thoughts have happened in people trying to quit smoking. Talk with your doctor.
- Tell your doctor if you are pregnant, plan on getting pregnant, or are breast-feeding. You will need to talk about the benefits and risks to you and the baby.

What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?

WARNING/CAUTION: Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered,

or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.

- Shortness of breath.
- Feeling confused.
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not there).
- Seizures.
- Sleepwalking has happened with this drug. Sometimes, this can lead to harm to you or others. Call your doctor right away if you start to sleepwalk.
- A very bad reaction called angioedema has happened with this drug. Sometimes, this may be life-threatening. Signs may include swelling of the hands, face, lips, eyes, tongue, or throat; trouble breathing; trouble swallowing; or unusual hoarseness. Get medical help right away if you have any of these signs.
- Severe skin reactions may happen with this drug. These include Stevens-Johnson syndrome (SJS) and other serious reactions. These reactions can be life-threatening. Get medical help right away if you have signs like red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin; red or irritated eyes; sores in your mouth, throat, nose, eyes, genitals, or any areas of skin; fever; chills; body aches; shortness of breath; or swollen glands.
- New or worse heart and blood vessel problems have happened with this drug. This includes heart attack and stroke. Most of the time, this happened in people who already had heart or blood vessel problems. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of heart attack like chest pain that may spread to the arms, neck, jaw, back, or stomach; sweating that is not normal; or feeling sick or throwing up. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of stroke like weakness on 1 side of the body; eyesight, speech, or balance problems; feeling confused; drooping on 1 side of the face; or very bad headache.
- New or worse mental, mood, or behavior problems have happened with this drug. These problems include thoughts of suicide or murder, depression, forceful actions, fury, anxiety, and anger. These problems have happened in people with and without a history of mental or mood problems. Watch

people who take this drug closely. If you think you have any of these problems, call your doctor right away. Call your doctor right away if you have any other signs like nervousness, restlessness, grouchiness, panic attacks, or any new or worse changes in mood or actions.

What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

- Upset stomach or throwing up.
- Constipation.
- Stomach pain.
- Gas.
- Dry mouth.
- Change in taste.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Strange or odd dreams.
- Headache.
- Feeling tired or weak.
- Signs of a common cold.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at https://www.fda.gov/medwatch.

How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

- Get counseling to help you quit smoking.
- Take after eating with a full glass of water.
- There are different ways that you can use this drug to help you quit smoking. Talk with your doctor about when to start treatment with this drug and when to stop smoking.

What do I do if I miss a dose?

- Take a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your normal time.
- Do not take 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

- Store at room temperature in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any

questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.

- This drug comes with an extra patient fact sheet called a Medication Guide. Read it with care. Read it again each time this drug is refilled. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with the doctor, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/know/clinical-effectiveness-terms.

Last Reviewed Date

2025-02-18

Copyright

© 2026 UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates and/or licensors. All rights reserved.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Varenicline (Systemic - Last updated on December 12, 2022
All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center