

Supporting Youth who are Addicted to Nicotine: Advice for Pediatricians

Ask the Right Questions:

- Ask about tobacco and nicotine use in the context of routine screening, using language that youth will understand. Sample screening questions include:
 - “Do you use any tobacco products, like cigarettes, chewing tobacco, or hookah? Have you used them in the last year?”
 - “Do you use any vaping products, like e-cigarettes or JUUL? Have you used them in the last year?”

Talk with Youth About Quitting:

- Provide [clear, personalized guidance](#) about the negative health impacts of tobacco use and vaping.
- Consider using [motivational interviewing](#) to guide a conversation about quitting.
- Messages that may resonate with youth include the impact of tobacco and vaping on breathing, athletic performance, health, or appearance. Other relevant messages may include the outbreak of vaping-related lung injuries, the expense of tobacco products, or the Tobacco Industry’s deceitful marketing practices that recruit youth to become life-long tobacco users.
- Consider using a practice tool to assess level of addiction to nicotine. Some options are the Hooked On Nicotine Checklist (tailored for [cigarettes](#) or [vaping](#)), the [E-Cigarette Dependence Scale](#), or the [Modified Fagerstrom Tolerance Questionnaire](#).

Help Youth make a Successful Quit Plan:

- Assess youth’s desire to quit and help them set a quit date within 2 weeks. Try to avoid stressful times, such as final exams.
- Develop a plan for success and anticipate challenges:
 - Quit completely: on the quit date, stop use of all tobacco and vaping products.
 - Triggers: identify people or situations that may cause youth to want to use tobacco or vape.
 - Withdrawal Symptoms: discuss the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal and develop strategies to manage them.
 - Social Support: identify friends and family who can encourage success. When appropriate, speak with youth and parent(s) together about the importance of a supportive social network.
 - Self-Care: consider support strategies such as healthy eating, exercise, mindfulness, or meditation.
- Utilize cessation support services:
 - [SmokefreeTeen.gov](#) (tobacco and vaping cessation support from the National Institutes of Health)
 - [This Is Quitting](#) (text-based tobacco and vaping cessation support service from Truth Initiative®)
 - 1-800-QUIT-NOW (national tobacco quitline)
 - Behavioral counseling or cognitive-behavioral therapy
- Consider pharmacotherapy for youth who are moderately or severely addicted:
 - FDA-approved tobacco dependence medications for adults include nicotine replacement therapy (eg, nicotine gum or patch), bupropion, and varenicline. At present, these medications have not been approved for youth under 18.
 - Limited research studies on pharmacotherapy for youth tobacco cessation have not demonstrated efficacy. However, there is no evidence of harm related to using nicotine replacement therapy in youth under 18.
 - Given the effectiveness of pharmacotherapy for adults and the severe harms of tobacco dependence, [AAP policy](#) recommends that pediatricians consider off-label pharmacotherapy for youth who are moderately or severely addicted.
 - In order for youth under 18 to access pharmacotherapy (including over-the-counter options), they need a prescription.
- Offer encouragement and assure youth that you are here to help them succeed.
- If the youth is not ready to quit completely, discuss strategies for cutting back and revisit the topic at their next visit.

Follow Up:

- Check in with the patient electronically or in-person to find out how the quit attempt is going.
- If the patient reports a relapse, talk with them about the circumstances surrounding the relapse, and help them learn from the experience. Encourage youth to use the cessation-support strategies above until they quit successfully.
- Tobacco cessation is a difficult process, and relapse is common. Additional support from a pediatrician or other healthcare provider can help the teen learn from their experiences and quit successfully.

Coding and Payment:

- Ensure that you and your office staff are compensated for the time you spend discussing tobacco and nicotine addiction during patient visits. For up-to-date information on coding, see the [AAP Tobacco Coding Fact Sheet](#).