Handout: Nicotine Patch Treatment Guidelines

Purpose of the Nicotine Patch

Almost all people experience nicotine withdrawal symptoms after they quit, such as cravings and urges to smoke, tension, irritability, sadness, sleep problems, and difficulty concentrating. These symptoms often cause people to start smoking again. Nicotine patches are a type of nicotine replacement therapy (commonly referred to as NRT), which contains low levels of nicotine that are released into the bloodstream. The purpose of the nicotine patch is to assist you in quitting smoking by reducing nicotine withdrawal symptoms by slowly weaning the body off it. Despite its effectiveness, the patch is not a "magic bullet." People still experience some withdrawal symptoms while wearing it. It is very important that you learn to be a nonsmoker while you are using the patch and avoid temptations to smoke.

Adverse Side Effects

Although many people experience no side effects from the patch, it is not uncommon to have some minor reactions. The most common of these is skin irritation or a mild rash. This is temporary and easy to treat. If you experience any skin reaction, be sure that you are moving your patch site daily. If this continues, discuss your concern with the study staff.

Proper Use of Nicotine Patches

- For women: do not use the patch if you are pregnant or intend to become pregnant or are currently breastfeeding.
- Do not use the patch if you have heart problems such as congenital heart failure, irregular heartbeat, or previous heart attacks.
- Apply a new patch daily starting the day you intend to quit.
- Place the sticky side of the patch on a clean, dry, hairless area below the neck and above the waistline. Hold for 10 seconds.
- Avoid skin areas that are irritated, broken, scarred, or tattooed.
- To avoid irritation, make sure to put the patch on a different skin site each day.
- It may be helpful to put the patch on at the same time each day in order to help you remember to wear it and for it to have the best effect.
- Do NOT wear the patch for longer than 24 hours or wear multiple patches at one time.
- If the patch causes sleep disturbances, you may remove the patch before bed and apply the new patch in the morning.
- Wash your hands after applying and removing the patch.
- Do not wear the patch in the shower-you can remove the patch before you shower and place it back on after you shower, or, cover it while showering.

If the patch is not sticking well

- Thoroughly clean the application site and remove any moisturizers or lotions that may prevent stickiness.
- Find an area with minimal perspiration (sweating).
- Make sure you apply significant pressure over the area.
- You may also use a bandage to help keep the patch in place.

Storage of the Nicotine Patch

- Store the patch at room temperature.
- Keep out of reach of children and pets.
- Keep away from excessive heat, moisture, and light.

Handling of the Nicotine Patch

- Do not use more than one of your recommended doses of nicotine patch at a time. If overdose is suspected, contact the American Association of Poison Control Centers at 1-800-222-1222 or seek further care at the emergency room.
- Wash your hands after applying or removing the nicotine patch. Nicotine could get into your eyes and nose and cause irritation.
- When removing, fold the patch in half, place it back in the original package, and dispose in the garbage.
- Do not share the nicotine patch with others.
- Do not cut the patch in half or in smaller pieces.