

A better strategy for quitting smoking

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(HealthDay)—Quitting smoking is one of the hardest things to do, but studies have found that one strategy in particular can help many people: Start anti-smoking medication well before your intended quit date.

Under traditional prescribing guidelines, people who plan to quit smoking with the help of a medication begin taking their anti-smoking

[drug](#) about one week before their set quit date. But about 75 percent of people who try to quit go back to smoking within a year.

So what's the solution? Research done at the University at Buffalo, in New York, showed that simply starting the drugs *four* weeks in advance can increase the success rate.

One study was done on bupropion, known by the brand name Zyban, and similar research has involved both [nicotine replacement therapy](#) and varenicline (Chantix).

The idea of taking quit-smoking [medication](#) earlier in advance of your quit date stemmed in part from reports of people who were taking these medications for other reasons—bupropion, for instance, is well-known as an antidepressant—and found that they gave up smoking *without even trying to quit*.

Four weeks also provides a good timeframe to mentally prepare to quit smoking. In fact, many [study participants](#) started smoking less before their quit date and without experiencing strong cravings or withdrawal symptoms. And their cravings tended to decrease.

As for results, over 50 percent of the people who started the drugs four weeks ahead of time remained smoke-free 30 days after quitting, compared to 31 percent who were given the standard one-week start date.

All study participants received [smoking](#) cessation counseling as well, which shows that a multifaceted approach brings the best results.

More information: The U.S. National Institutes of Health has online tools to help you through every facet of a [quit smoking plan](#).

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