

Want to stop smoking? See a specialist

20 December 2013

Smokers in England who want to stop smoking are three times more likely to succeed if they see a trained advisor than if they try by themselves, according to a new study published online today in the medical journal *Addiction*. Worryingly, just buying nicotine patches, gum or other licensed nicotine products from a shop does not seem to improve the chances of quitting.

This is the first study using population-based survey data that has been large enough to assess the real-world effectiveness of using National Health Service (NHS) stop-smoking services compared with quitting without help.

The study uses data from a very large ongoing UK research programme (the Smoking Toolkit Study – see <http://www.smokinginengland.info>) that has been surveying [smokers](#) and recent ex-smokers since 2007. The study published today in *Addiction* analyses survey responses from more than 10,000 people in England who had tried to quit smoking in the prior 12 months, to discover what methods of quitting had the highest success rates.

The study shows not only that stop smoking services are smokers' best bet for stopping, but also that smokers may not be benefiting in the way they should from buying over-the-counter nicotine replacement therapies. The researchers estimate that smokers who use a combination of specialist behavioural support together with a stop smoking medicine or nicotine product in their quit attempts have approximately three times the odds of success than those who stop smoking without any aid. But on the flip side, smokers who buy [nicotine replacement therapy](#) over-the-counter with no contact with a health professional have similar odds of success as those who stop without any aid. This is particularly relevant at a time when the number of people using stop smoking services is falling and several million smokers buy [nicotine replacement](#) therapies over-the-counter each year.

Professor Robert West from University College London, who led the team of researchers, said:

'When you think that stopping smoking saves 6 hours of life for every day of smoking avoided, investing an hour or two over a 6 week period to see an NHS [stop smoking](#) advisor seems like a good investment. They can provide cheaper medicine than is available in shops and advise how to use it properly. It's crazy that not all smokers who want to stop do it. As far as nicotine products bought from shops are concerned, there is an urgent need to understand what is going on because we know that if these products are used properly they can be effective.'

More information: Kotz D, Brown J, and West R. "Real-world" effectiveness of smoking cessation treatments: a population study. *Addiction*, 108: [DOI: 10.1111/add.12429](https://doi.org/10.1111/add.12429)

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