Clozapine and Smoking - Information for Service Users and Carers

This leaflet explains some issues that are important if you are taking clozapine and smoke tobacco and intend changing your smoking habit.

1. So what is the problem?
There isn’t really a problem – there are just some extra precautions needed if you are taking clozapine and changing your smoking habits. Cigarette smoke causes the body to break down some medications, including clozapine, more quickly than usual. So if you are prescribed clozapine, and are a smoker, you will probably need a higher dose to achieve the same benefit as a non-smoker would achieve.

2. How does this affect me?
Ordinarily this doesn’t matter at all, since the dose of clozapine you take has been tailored to suit you and takes account of your smoking (or non-smoking, as the case may be). However, if you decide to stop or cut down on your smoking your requirement for clozapine will be lower.

3. Can’t I use a nicotine patch or nicotine gum and then stay on the same dose?
No. The nicotine replacement products only replace the nicotine. Other chemicals in the smoke, which the patches don’t replace, cause the change in breakdown of clozapine.

4. What happens if I decide to start smoking again or increase my consumption?
In that case, your requirements for clozapine may increase. Remember, the clozapine is broken down more quickly once you are smoking again or using more cigarettes, so in fact the increased dose is needed to keep the same amount of clozapine in your body.

5. Will I need more blood tests if I stop or restart smoking?
The routine blood tests you undergo are designed to check if the clozapine affects your blood cells, and will carry on unchanged. You may also have had a different blood test in the past to measure how much clozapine is present in your blood. Your consultant may need to perform one of these tests to check the dose is right, but where possible the sample for this test will be taken at the same time as your routine blood test.

6. If my dose is increased, will I get more side-effects?
Hopefully you won’t, because the dose change is designed to keep the same amount of clozapine in your blood. However, while the dose is being fine-tuned, there is some possibility of a short period where the dose is not exactly suited to you. This might lead to some unwanted effects.

If you have any more questions, do not hesitate to ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for more information.

Originally produced: April 2007
Next review due: January 2024