

# An Overview of Tobacco Cessation Counseling

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Individual and group counseling is a key strategy for providing support to individuals during their attempts to quit smoking. Counseling has been shown to improve the likelihood of achieving success, particularly when used in conjunction with cessation medications.<sup>1</sup> Counseling programs provide information and resources to help tobacco users develop a quit plan, address specific barriers to quitting, seek support for their efforts, and manage withdrawal symptoms and stress to prevent relapse. The most effective counseling is tailored to meet individual needs and preferences. Methods and intensity will vary based on the type and amount of support needed.<sup>2</sup>

The following counseling methods have been shown to be effective in improving quit rates.<sup>1</sup>

### Telephone-based counseling (quit lines, call-back counseling)<sup>1,2</sup>

- Connects individuals trying to quit with tobacco cessation counselors over the phone
- Offers flexibility and privacy
- Provides a convenient resource and is readily accessible at moments when smokers feel the need for support
- Provides personal support to keep individuals on track

### Individual counseling<sup>1,2</sup>

- Provides a series of in-person, individual counseling sessions with a trained tobacco cessation counselor
- Allows counseling to be tailored to address unique individual issues
- Offers reinforcement and continuing support

### Group counseling<sup>1,2</sup>

- Provides a series of in-person group counseling sessions among smokers trying to quit, led by a trained tobacco cessation counselor
- Has the advantage of involving interaction between participants that provides peer support, guidance and reinforcement

## Key Elements of Counseling Treatment<sup>1</sup>

- Problem solving skills in the following areas: achieving total abstinence, reviewing previous quit attempt successes and failures, identifying and avoiding triggers, limiting/abstaining from alcohol, and encouraging housemates to quit
- Support and encouragement as part of treatment
- Professional guidance from trained, experienced counselors and clinicians

## Additional Information

- The delivery of smoking cessation programs using more than one method of counseling is beneficial.<sup>1,3</sup>
- Clinicians should provide multiple counseling sessions because there is a strong relationship between greater numbers of counseling sessions and improved cessation outcomes.<sup>1,3</sup>
- Cessation rates improve as the length of counseling sessions increases. High intensity (more than 10 minutes) sessions result in higher quit rates than minimal intensity (less than 3 minutes) sessions.<sup>4</sup>
- Counseling can be provided by a variety of clinicians including, but not limited to, health educators, tobacco treatment specialists, physicians, nurse practitioners, and pharmacists.<sup>1</sup>
- The combination of counseling and medications has been found to be more effective for smoking cessation than the use of either method alone.<sup>1</sup>

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Fiore MC, Jaén CR, Baker TB, et al. *Treating tobacco use and dependence: 2008 update*. Clinical practice guideline. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Public Health Service; 2008. Available at: [http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco/treating\\_tobacco\\_use08.pdf](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco/treating_tobacco_use08.pdf).
- <sup>2</sup> National Business Group on Health. Tobacco: The business of quitting. Treatment options. Available at: <http://www.businessgrouphealth.org/tobacco/treatment/>
- <sup>3</sup> Stead LF, Perera R, Lancaster T. Telephone counseling for tobacco cessation. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. 2006;3:CD002850.
- <sup>4</sup> Zbikowski SM, Hapgood J, Smucker Barnwell S, McAfee T. Phone and web-based tobacco cessation treatment real-world utilization patterns and outcomes for 11,000 tobacco users. *J Med Internet Res*. 2008;10(5):e41.

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