

Tobacco Treatment Program

Patient FAQs

What kind of service is the Tobacco Treatment Program?

The Tobacco Treatment Program helps people quit using cigarettes and all other tobacco products. Treatment services include counseling and medications for quitting tobacco use.

Who is eligible for the Tobacco Treatment Program?

All active MD Anderson Cancer Center patients are eligible to enter the Tobacco Treatment Program. Patients in the Clinical Cancer Prevention Program are also eligible for the program. In some cases, family members of patients living in the same household may be considered eligible for the program. However, patients who come to MD Anderson Cancer for a second opinion only are ineligible for the program.

Why would I need to meet with a counselor to quit using cigarettes or tobacco products?

Research studies show that working with a trained professional counselor (a clinician) in addition to taking medications is more effective than doing only one or the other or trying to quit on your own. This combination also helps minimize the likelihood of relapse.

What will I talk about with my clinician?

During your first appointment you will receive information about the Tobacco Treatment Program and you will get answers to any questions that you may have. Your clinician will explore your tobacco use and related factors or triggers, like stress, anxiety or boredom, that influence when and how you use tobacco products. With this information, you and your clinician can create a plan for reducing or quitting your tobacco use.

Will I meet with the same clinician at each visit?

Occasionally throughout your treatment, other clinicians in our program may be involved in your care, but your primary clinician will remain the same.

Who are the staff at the Tobacco Treatment Program?

Our program has professional clinicians from several disciplines, including social work, psychology, nursing and psychiatry. If needed, you may be evaluated by our medical team for any medical or psychiatric needs. In addition to our clinical staff, you will also have contact with our support staff.

What questions will the support staff ask of me?

The support staff will help you schedule appointments with your clinician and assist you with various clinical assessment tools, which will be used to plan and monitor your progress in the program. The assessment tools include questions related to your tobacco use and overall mood in addition to blowing into a small device that measures the level of carbon monoxide in your breath as a result of smoking.

How long and how frequent are the sessions?

You can expect to spend approximately two hours in our clinic during the first visit. Follow-up visits are approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The program usually involves a total of six to eight visits. Follow-up sessions may be done over the phone (15-20 minutes each) when traveling to MD Anderson is not feasible.

What if I'm not ready to quit using tobacco?

You are still eligible and welcome to participate in the program. You can discuss your uncertainty with your clinician, who can assist with identifying motivational issues, setting short and long-term goals and strategies for achieving them. For example, you may choose to reduce your tobacco use for a period of time before quitting altogether. This choice is always yours.

Will my participation in the program be kept confidential from my physician?

For each visit, a brief summary is documented into your electronic medical record to share the information with your other healthcare providers in the institution, as we are an integral part of your treatment team at MD Anderson. However, we cannot share any of your information with other physicians outside of MD Anderson unless you provide a written authorization to release your medical records.

How long does the program last?

Active treatment is three to four months (six to eight visits total). Our staff will also contact you for long-term follow-up appointments every three months up to one year from the completion of the active treatment.

What if I cannot quit during the first three to four months?

If you did not quit during the active treatment period of the program, then we can discuss a possible return to the program depending on your interest and motivation. Alternatively, we may extend the treatment period, change your medication regimen or refer you to our addiction specialist for further assistance. The important thing to know is that **we will not abandon** you if you do not succeed as long as you are interested and are trying to quit using tobacco.

What is the difference between the initial consultation and follow-up visits?

The initial consultation establishes you as a patient in our program and allows one of our clinicians to meet with you to develop a treatment plan. This allows you to ask any questions that you may have about the program. The follow-up sessions are shorter in duration and enable you to continue to work on your goals with your clinician.

How will appointments be scheduled?

Our support staff will attempt to pair your Tobacco Treatment Program sessions with your existing MD Anderson appointments to minimize your travel. Alternatively, for your follow-up sessions, you can work out mutually convenient times with your clinician for either in-person or telephone visits.

What happens if I miss an appointment?

Whenever possible, please inform our staff if you will not be able to keep an appointment. However, if you miss an appointment and are unable to alert our staff, we will attempt to contact you to schedule another one. If we are unable to contact you by telephone, then we will send an inquiry letter to you to ascertain your interest in continuing in the program.

Can I contact my clinician by telephone or email?

Yes, your clinician would be happy to communicate with you over the telephone as some of our follow-up appointments are conducted over the phone. In addition, you may contact your clinician via a secure email system through the myMDAnderson website. Our support staff can assist you with setting up a myMDAnderson account if you do not have one already.

What types of medications are provided in the program?

Our standard program provides FDA approved medications for assistance with quitting smoking or the use of tobacco products. These medications include nicotine-replacement therapies (NRTs), such as the patch, gum, lozenge and inhaler, and two prescription medications, Bupropion (Zyban®) and Varenicline (Chantix®). If those do not help you or if they cause you any side effects, you may meet with our physician to consider other medication options.

Where do I pick up my medications from the program?

You may pick up your medications at any of the three pharmacies at MD Anderson. Two are located in the Main Building (Alkek) on Floor 2 or Floor 10, and the third is in the ACB building (Mays Clinic) on Floor 2. If you are not geographically close to MD Anderson our support staff will mail the medication to you.

Do insurance plans usually cover this type of treatment and medication?

After the initial free three months, our medical team can provide you with a prescription to extend the medication for up to three months. You can then take the prescription to your local pharmacy to be filled and charged to your insurance plan. Insurance plans vary in terms of coverage for tobacco-cessation medications, so contact your provider for more information.

What if a member of my household is a tobacco user, can they enter the program?

If a member of your household is not a patient, then once you have become a patient of the Tobacco Treatment Program, he/she can receive counseling services from our staff at no cost. In some cases we also provide medication to smokers in the household of MD Anderson patients.

Where is the Tobacco Treatment Program located?

The Tobacco Treatment Program is located on Floor 2 of the Cancer Prevention Building in the Behavioral Research and Treatment Center (BRTC). The BRTC is located directly behind The Star if you follow MD Anderson Access signs.

How can I contact the Tobacco Treatment Program for questions or more information?

Our staff can be contacted in a variety of ways. To enroll, please call us at 713-792-7848, toll-free at 1-866-245-0862, or make inquiries by email at quitnow@mdanderson.org. You may also read more about our program by visiting the Tobacco Treatment Program website. After the initial session, you can send your Tobacco Treatment Program clinician a secure electronic message via myMDAnderson.