



Nicotine-dependent detainees in police custody

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The vast majority of smokers can refrain from smoking for a period, but it should be remembered that the effects of withdrawal from any substance, including nicotine, are likely to be exacerbated by the circumstances of acute enforced detention and may affect the legal process adversely. Many of the features of nicotine withdrawal are indistinguishable from anxiety.

The exact period for which a smoker can refrain without problematic symptoms will vary from individual to individual. In severe states dysphoria and threats of self-harm may be seen.

Police custody provides an opportunity for smoking cessation promotion by way of brief interventions where appropriate and signposting to local agencies.

Some forms of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT), such as lozenges and gum are available to buy over the counter by members of the public and do not need to be prescribed.

Therefore, there is potential for police forces to offer nicotine replacement therapy to detainees without the involvement of a healthcare professional.

If NRT is offered, the FFLM recommends that a Pharmacist draws up a protocol for the Police Force on use of non-prescription NRT. Detainees should be offered a copy of the patient information leaflet (or an easy-read version if needed) and sign to say they have not got any conditions which exclude them from using NRT.

If a detainee is in possession of a prescription-only NRT, a healthcare professional will be needed to authorise the continuation of this.

Detainees who have electronic cigarettes in their possession should not be allowed to use them whilst in police custody, as they are unlicensed products. They can be offered alternative forms of NRT during their custodial period as per the local protocol.