Assessing nicotine dependence

- All clients who smoke should be assessed for nicotine dependence.
- There is no need to do the full Fagerstrom test for nicotine dependence – asking three simple questions will suffice to determine if the client is nicotine dependent (see box below).
- The time to first cigarette is a stronger indicator of nicotine dependence than the number of cigarettes smoked. A previous experience of withdrawal symptoms during a quit attempt is also a sign of nicotine dependence.
- A client who is nicotine dependent is likely to need NRT while they are in hospital and are unable to smoke. This will help to manage cravings and nicotine withdrawal symptoms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question to ask</th>
<th>Response indicating nicotine dependence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;How soon after waking do you smoke your first cigarette?&quot;</td>
<td>Within 30 minutes of waking</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;How many cigarettes do you smoke on a typical day?&quot;</td>
<td>More than 10 cigarettes per day</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;If you have previously attempted to quit, did you experience withdrawals or cravings?&quot;</td>
<td>A history of withdrawal symptoms in previous quit attempts</td>
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Client is considered to be nicotine dependent if a positive response is given to one or more of the above questions.

Identifying cravings and withdrawal symptoms

**What is a craving?**
A craving is when the smoker continuously ‘thinks about’ or ‘longs for’ a cigarette and cannot suppress the ‘urge to use’ tobacco.

**What are nicotine withdrawal symptoms?**
Smokers may not be aware of all the withdrawal symptoms that are linked to smoking cessation. The following list includes the most common (but not all) nicotine withdrawal symptoms:

- Cravings
- Anxiety
- Restlessness
- Depressed mood
- Decreased heart rate
- Insomnia / trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep
- Irritability, frustration, anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Nausea
- Feeling hungry/increased appetite

**Notes:**
- Other symptoms may include coughing/sore throat, feeling light-headed/dizzy, headache, mouth ulcers, constipation, dreaming/nightmares. These symptoms can occur for other reasons so caution should be exercised in attributing them to nicotine withdrawal.
- Ensure clients are provided with enough NRT to control withdrawal symptoms. (See Tool 4 ‘Flowchart for NRT use in hospital’)
- Record data related to cravings and withdrawal symptoms in the client’s medical notes. (Use NSW Health ‘Monitoring chart for symptoms of nicotine withdrawal’)