PEARLS

Practical Evidence About Real Life Situations

Can we incentivise people to quit smoking?

Clinical Question	What are the long-term effects of offering incentives for smoking cessation?
Bottom Line	Incentives significantly boost long-term smoking cessation rates in mixed populations and pregnant individuals, with effects persisting even after incentives end. This suggests that time-limited incentivized interventions can support sustained abstinence. Both low- and moderate-value incentives are effective in encouraging long-term smoking abstinence beyond the reward period. Deposit-refund trials, though less popular among participants than reward-based programs, achieve comparable or higher quit rates among participants who contribute their own money.
Caveat	This review includes studies from diverse cultural settings, indicating that the impact of incentives on smoking cessation is generalizable across various populations, including low- and middle-income countries. The overall quality of the evidence included was high and so the results are considered highly reliable.
Context	Smoking is a leading cause of preventable death and disease worldwide. Despite effective cessation methods, quit rates remain low in some populations. Incentives, such as financial rewards, can be used to encourage smoking cessation and have shown promise in changing unhealthy behaviours. However, their effectiveness may be limited to the duration of the incentive. Incentive programs to encourage smoking cessation have been suggested as beneficial especially during pregnancy. Incentives work through positively rewarding desired behaviour and can be particularly beneficial for low-income groups by providing financial support and boosting self-esteem.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Notley C, Gentry S, Livingstone-Banks J, Bauld L, Perera R, Conde M, Hartmann-Boyce J. Incentives for smoking cessation. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2025, Issue 1. Art. No.: CD004307. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD004307.pub7. This review contains 48 trials which included 21,924 people.

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Systematic review link:
https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD004307.pub7/full