

OVERCOMING NICOTINE ADDICTION: A TAILORED APPROACH FOR INDIA

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Nicotine addiction is a huge problem in India, taking over 900,000 lives each year and trapping millions with cigarettes, beedis, gutka, paan masala, and khaini. I work as a smoking cessation advisor in the UK right now, helping people quit every day with plans that fit their lives. In India, tobacco is tied to culture and money, so we need solutions that match our diversity. As No Smoking Day nears on March 12, 2025, I want to share what I've learned in the UK and suggest ideas for India—ideas that fit us and support Dr. Edmond Fernandes' belief at CHD Group that healthcare is key to a better life.

The Reality of Addiction: Lessons from the Frontline

In the UK, I meet all kinds of smokers—a truck driver smoking on long trips, an office worker lighting up at lunch. They talk about feeling jittery, craving tobacco, or losing focus when they try to stop. In India, it's the same fight, just with different habits—some chew tobacco, others smoke. My job shows me everyone's addiction is different, so one plan doesn't work for all. I use the Fagerström Test, a simple set of questions like "How soon do you smoke after waking?" or "How much do you smoke a day?" It gives a score from 0 to 10—a 7 means they're really hooked. In India, we could tweak this test for chewers and smokers to figure out how tough their addiction is and plan accordingly.

Awareness: The First Step I Always Take

In the UK, I start by explaining how nicotine grabs hold—it messes with your brain, making quitting hard. People feel better when I say those shaky feelings aren't their fault; it's just science. I show them their Fagerström score—a 5 means they're halfway hooked—and it clicks. In India, lots of people don't know this. Imagine a worker understanding why tobacco pulls them back or a young person seeing cigarettes aren't cool. My UK talks work because I keep it easy—no big words, just real talk. Here, health workers at local spots, radio in everyday languages, or posters where people hang out could spread this knowledge and get folks thinking.

Nicotine Replacement Therapy: A Tool I Swear By

In the UK, I rely on Nicotine Replacement Therapy—patches to keep you calm, gum for quick cravings, lozenges when it's rough. I use Fagerström scores to pick the right dose; an 8 needs a strong start. It gives nicotine without tobacco's bad stuff, making quitting smoother. In India, we have this too, but not enough people use it. Think of health camps handing out patches or shops offering gum with a friendly tip. My UK clients say it makes quitting less of a mess—India could use this to fight those 900,000 deaths each year.

Behavioural Support: Where I See Lives Change

In the UK, the big wins come from talking. I ask, "What makes you smoke?"—stress, a dull moment, friends. Fagerström scores show if it's habit or need; a 3 means it's more routine. I suggest walks instead of smoking, and groups cheer each other on with stories. In India, tobacco fits into daily life—chewing after food, smoking with pals—so we need this personal touch. Maybe swap it for tea or a deep breath. My UK groups feel like India's tight communities—imagine neighbours clapping for each quit day. Kind, custom support changes everything.

Technology: A Game-Changer I Embrace

In the UK, tech helps me reach more people—apps count "30 days smoke-free," texts stop cravings, online calls help those far away. Fagerström scores make it personal: heavy smokers get extra messages. India's got 700 million phones, so we could do this—an app tracking tobacco-free days for a worker, a helpline texting a farmer. Tech cuts distances in my job; here, it could link villages to cities, giving support anytime, anywhere with just a phone.

Rallying Communities: A Tactic That Pays Off

In the UK, I run campaigns—posters in shops, talks at clubs, people joining in. Quitting grows when everyone's involved. India's great at coming together—health workers at markets, kids doing skits for No Smoking Day, local leaders pushing tobacco-free spots. Fagerström scores could start chats; a

high score might get friends to help. In the UK, local energy beats big orders—India could make quitting a team effort, not a lone battle.

Bringing It Home

In my UK work, NRT, Fagerström plans, and group support cut smoking and save lives every day. India's tobacco problem—900,000 deaths a year—needs this kind of push, made for our mix of people. NRT can calm the body, personal talks can lift the spirit, and tech can reach everyone—rural or city, rich or poor. Dr. Fernandes says healthcare builds a better world; nicotine addiction tears it down. This No Smoking Day, let's use my UK ideas for India's lives—smokers, chewers, all of us. I see people win in the UK daily; millions here can too, one step at a time.

About the Author: **Dr. Bala Bhargav Parvatham**

Dr. Bala Bhargav Parvatham is a dedicated public health strategist and smoking cessation advisor in the UK. Holding a Bachelor of Dental Surgery from Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences and a Master's in Public Health and Health Promotion from Swansea University, he combines clinical precision with a deep understanding of health promotion. With over four years of experience in tobacco cessation, Dr. Parvatham is a certified NCSCT Level 3 Smoking Cessation Practitioner and leverages advanced counseling techniques from his Level 7 Advanced Diploma in Counselling and Psychology to empower individuals to quit.

A Fellow of the Royal Society for Public Health (FRSPH) and a Practitioner of the UK Public Health Register (UKPHR), Dr. Parvatham brings evidence-based strategies and empathetic support to his work. His career spans dentistry, public health advocacy, and community health projects in India and the UK. Passionate about building resilient, tobacco-free communities, he champions innovative solutions—such as Nicotine Replacement Therapy, behavioral support, and technology—to address nicotine addiction globally. Dr. Parvatham's commitment to public health reflects a vision of well-being as a cornerstone of human progress, making him a valuable voice in the fight against India's tobacco crisis.