

# A Clinical Guide to Smoking Cessation

Evidence-based pharmacotherapy, behavioral interventions, and support systems for helping patients quit.

Clinical Reference

Updated May 2026

Estimated Read: 14 min





**70%**

of patients who  
smoke want  
to quit.



**5%**

Unaided success  
rate. Going “cold  
turkey” without  
support yields  
minimal results.



**65%**

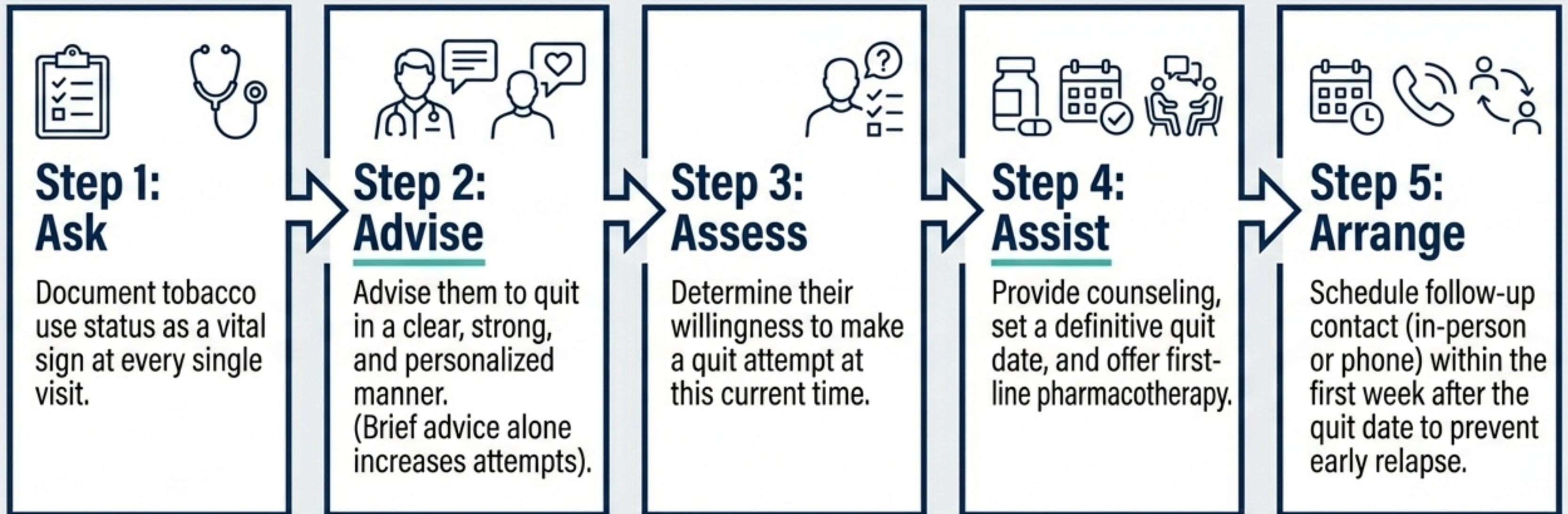
Relapse rate  
within one year  
of an unaided  
attempt.



**Tobacco dependence is a chronic disease requiring repeated interventions, evidence-based pharmacotherapy, and structured follow-up.**

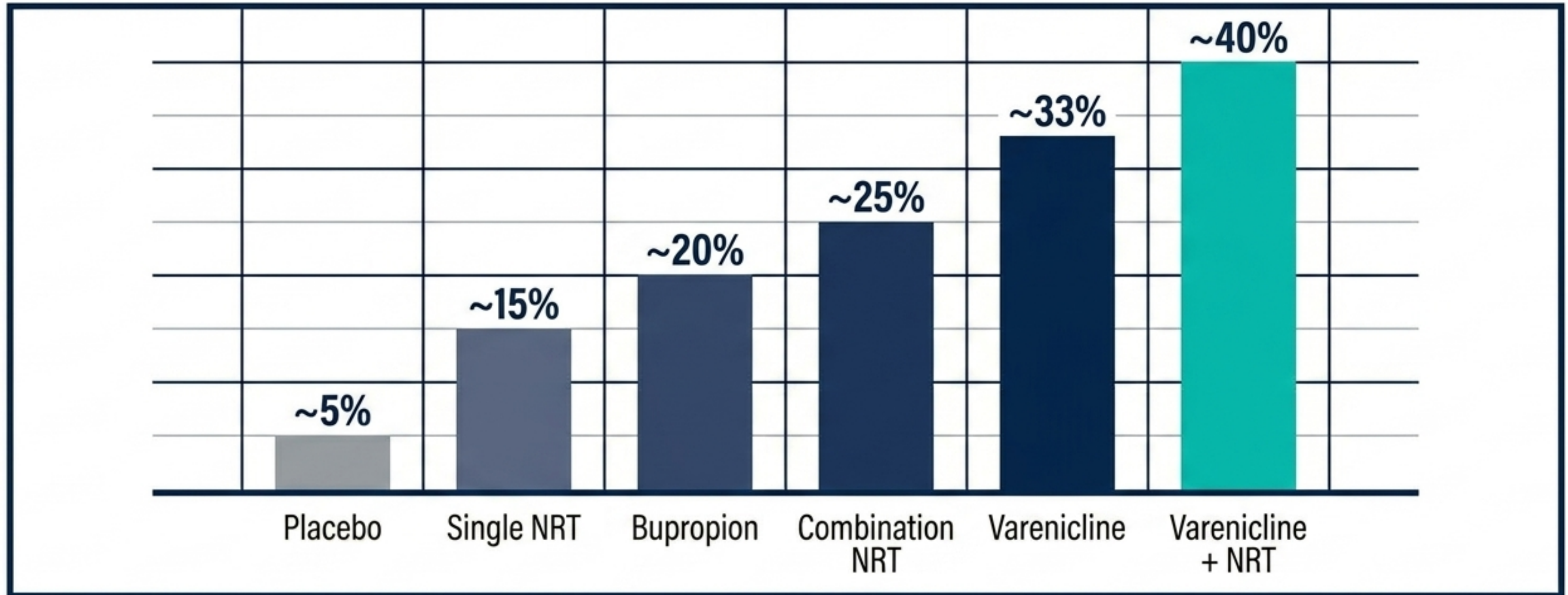


# The Clinical Foundation: The 5 A's Model





# The Efficacy Ladder: 12-Week Continuous Abstinence Rates



Rates are approximate and vary across trials/populations. FDA-approved therapies mitigate nicotine withdrawal and block reinforcing effects.



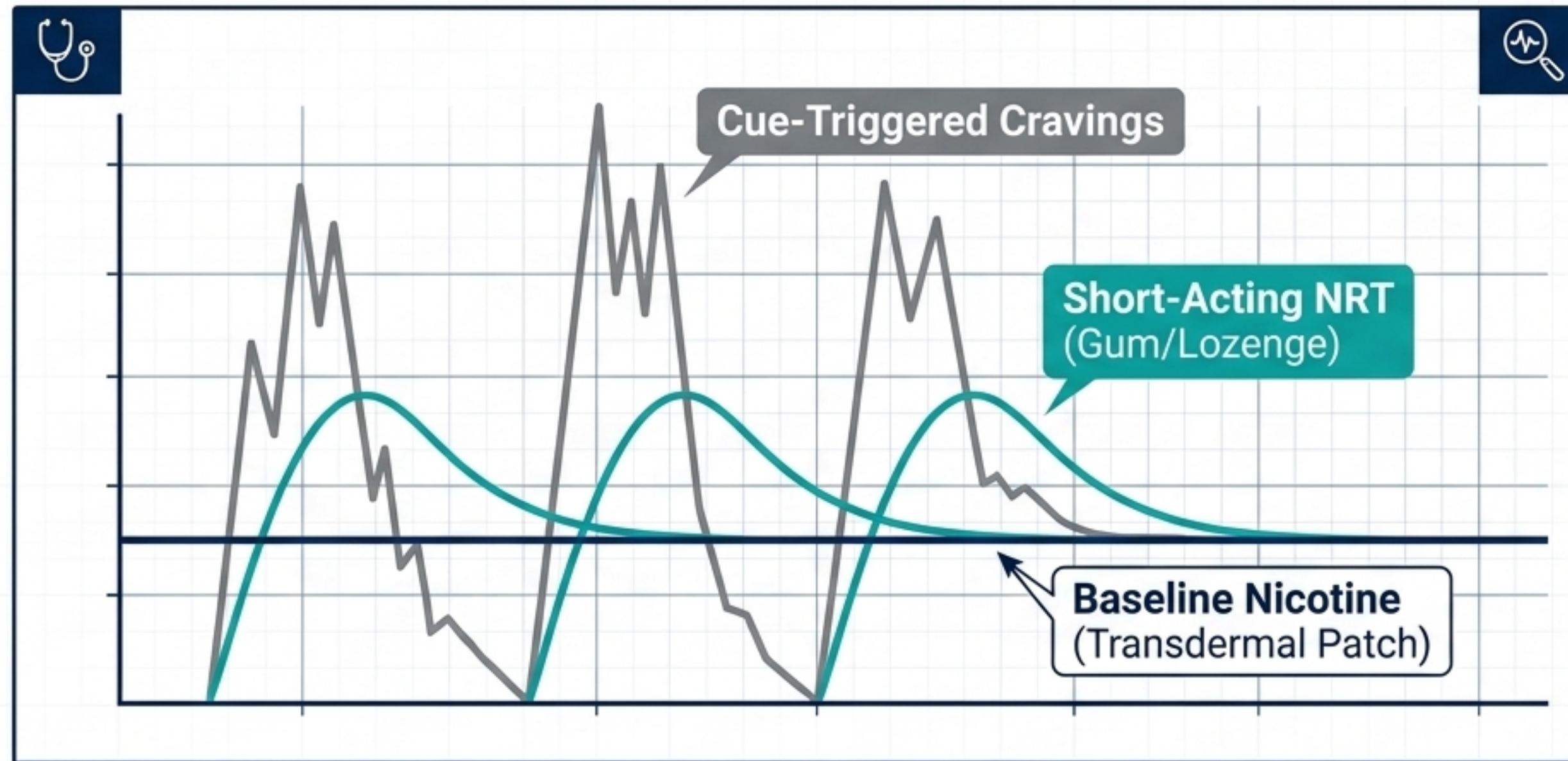
# First-Line Pharmacotherapy Matrix

| Medication                                                                                                      | Mechanism of Action                                                                          | Efficacy Profile                                                                       | Clinical Pearls / Contraindications                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Varenicline (Chantix)</b>   | Partial agonist highly selective for $\alpha 4\beta 2$ nicotinic acetylcholine receptors.    | <b>Top-tier monotherapy.</b> Reduces withdrawal while blocking nicotine binding.       | The landmark EAGLES trial proved it does not increase adverse neuropsychiatric events, safe for patients with psychiatric disorders.             |
| <b>Bupropion SR (Zyban)</b>  | Norepinephrine and dopamine reuptake inhibitor; nicotinic acetylcholine receptor antagonist. | Doubles abstinence vs placebo. Useful for comorbid depression or weight gain concerns. | <b>CONTRAINDICATED</b> in seizure disorders, eating disorders, or abrupt alcohol/benzo cessation (lowers seizure threshold).                     |
| <b>Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)</b>                                                                       | Slow systemic venous absorption rather than rapid arterial spikes of inhaled smoke.          | 55% increase in quit chance compared to placebo.                                       | Monotherapy is outclassed by combination therapy (see next slide). Cytisine (similar to varenicline) is highly effective but lacks FDA approval. |



# The Mechanics of Combination NRT

Why  $1 + 1 = 3$  in Nicotine Replacement Therapy



## Prescribing Pearl

### Combine Formulations

Combining a long-acting NRT (daily patch for steady-state levels) with a short-acting NRT (gum, lozenge, nasal spray for breakthrough cravings) significantly outperforms monotherapy.

Varying delivery methods disrupts the brain's expectation of a predictable dopamine spike, helping to extinguish behavioral cue-triggered cravings.



# The Methodology Debate: Abrupt Cessation vs. Gradual Reduction



## Abrupt Cessation

**22%**

abstinent at 6 months

**RECOMMENDED**

Setting a firm quit date and stopping completely. More effective regardless of patient preference. Supports psychological commitment and avoids prolonging cue exposure.



## Gradual Reduction

**15.5%**

abstinent at 6 months

**NOT RECOMMENDED**

Progressively reducing cigarettes before a quit date. Lower success rates even among patients who preferred this method (per Lindson-Hawley et al. trial). Perpetuates cue-reactivity.



# Evidence-Based Psychological Adjuncts



## CBT & Motivational Interviewing

### Focus: Triggers & Habituation

Identifies triggers, develops coping strategies, and manages negative affect.

Shows significant benefits over brief advice alone by addressing the psychological core of habit and relapse.



## Clinical Hypnosis

### Focus: Subconscious Restructuring

A single structured session yields a 23% success rate (comparable to pharmacotherapy) per Dr. David Spiegel (Stanford).

Delivered via the validated Reveri app for low-barrier patient access.



## ACT & Mindfulness

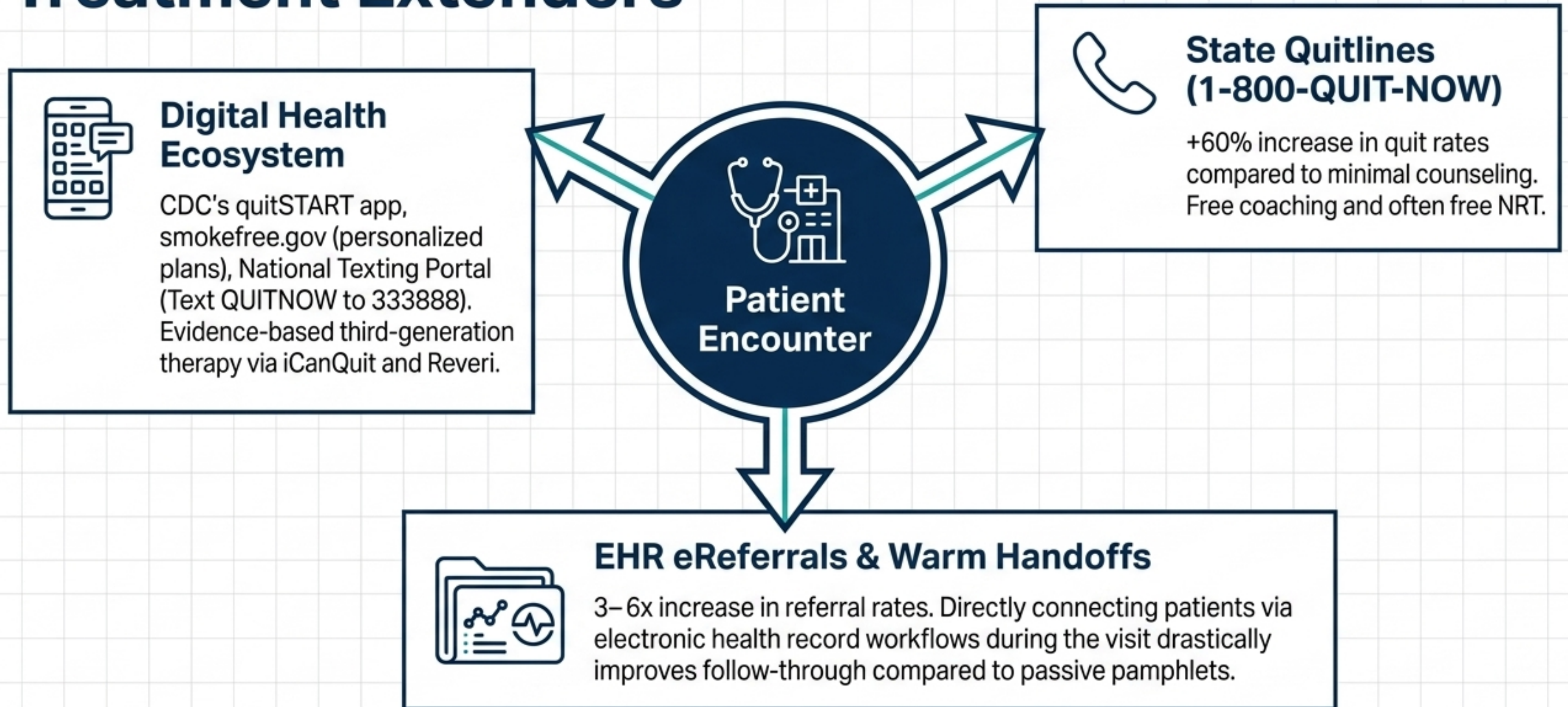
### Focus: Distress Tolerance

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy teaches observation of cravings without automatic reaction.

Delivered via the iCanQuit smartphone app, showing significant benefit over standard cessation apps.



# Systemic Support & Treatment Extenders





# Synthesis: The Master Clinical Checklist

|   |                                  |                                                                                                                               |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | <b>Execute the 5 A's.</b>        | Ask, Advise, Assess, Assist, Arrange at every patient encounter.                                                              |
| 2 | <b>Prescribe First-Line.</b>     | Default to Varenicline (cleared by EAGLES trial) or Combination NRT (Patch + Gum/Lozenge).                                    |
| 3 | <b>Mandate Abrupt Cessation.</b> | Set a firm quit date and advise against gradual reduction to maximize odds.                                                   |
| 4 | <b>Execute a Warm Handoff.</b>   | Route the patient to 1-800-QUIT-NOW or evidence-based apps (iCanQuit, Reveri) via EHR eReferral before they leave the clinic. |
| 5 | <b>Arrange Early Follow-Up.</b>  | Schedule a check-in within 1 week of the quit date to intercept early relapse vulnerability.                                  |