

ESCAPE Digital: Plain English Summary

More people with depression and anxiety smoke compared to the general population. Stopping smoking can make people's physical and mental health better. People can get help with their mental health or smoking online. Support for both at the same time is not available at the moment in health services. We ran a study to find out if it was possible to combine stop smoking with mental health support and get enough people to take part and answer questions online. This would help us understand if we could run a larger study to find out if combining support helps people to stop smoking.

We invited adult smokers over the age of 18 who were getting online mental health support to take part. Those who agreed to take part had an equal chance of being put in a group that either had access to stop smoking support with their main treatment or received their main treatment alone. After 3 and 6 months, participants were sent questionnaires about their smoking, mental health, and views on the support and the study.

1 in 5 people who were invited to take part agreed. In total, 309 people took part, which was below our target of 500. We found that 1 in 5 people who took part in the study reported trying to stop smoking, and this proportion was the same across both study groups. There were some technical problems with the online smoking support, which meant there was a delay in some people being able to access it. There was higher drop-out than we expected when we followed people up at 3 and 6 months; we only got responses from 1 in 3 participants.

We have learnt a lot about the improvements we would need to run another study in future. This would include improving recruitment by targeting mental health services that have larger numbers of people getting online support and allowing a longer technical set-up time so the stop smoking support is available straightaway. We would also need to increase the number of people completing questionnaires at 3 and 6 months. The large number of participants who stopped taking part before the end makes it unclear whether we could test the combined support in a larger study.