

E-Cigarettes

What Are E-Cigarettes?

E-cigarettes look high tech, so it's easy to believe the hype that they're a safe alternative to smoking. Unfortunately, they're not: E-cigarettes are just another way of putting nicotine — a highly addictive drug — into your body.

Electronic cigarettes are battery-powered smoking devices often designed to look and feel like regular cigarettes. They use cartridges filled with a liquid that contains nicotine, flavorings, and other chemicals. A heating device in the e-cigarette converts the liquid into a vapor, which the person inhales. That's why using e-cigs is known as "vaping."

Because e-cigarettes don't burn tobacco, people don't inhale the same amounts of tar and carbon monoxide as they would with a regular cigarette. But anyone using an e-cig still gets an unhealthy dose of nicotine and other chemicals.

Electronic cigarettes have been marketed to smokers as a way to help them quit, but there's no evidence that they actually help people stop smoking. Instead, they've been found to be a health risk for people who use them, as well as for bystanders who breathe in the secondhand vapor (what comes out of the device and the user's mouth) and third-hand vapor (what's deposited on surfaces such as upholstery, clothing, and floors).

Now that e-cigarettes have gone mainstream, regulators and scientists are studying them a lot more. Expect to see more information coming out about e-cigarettes and their health effects.

What's the Danger?

E-cigarettes don't fill the lungs with harmful smoke, but that doesn't make them a healthy alternative to regular cigarettes.

When you use ("vape") an e-cigarette, you're still putting nicotine — which is absorbed through your lungs — into your system. In addition to being an addictive drug, nicotine is also toxic in high doses. It was once even used as an insecticide to kill bugs.

Nicotine affects your brain, nervous system, and heart. It raises blood pressure and heart rate. The larger the dose of nicotine, the more a person's blood pressure and heart rate go up. This can cause an abnormal heart rate (arrhythmia). In rare cases, especially when large doses of nicotine are involved, arrhythmias can cause heart failure and death.

After its initial effects wear off, the body starts to crave nicotine. You might feel depressed, tired, or crabby (known as nicotine withdrawal), and crave more nicotine to perk up again. Over time, nicotine use can lead to serious medical problems, including heart disease, blood clots, and stomach ulcers.

Kicking the Habit

Because nicotine is so addictive, the best way to avoid the trouble of trying to quit smoking or stop using e-cigs is never to start.

If you smoke and want to quit, e-cigarettes probably aren't your best option. Using an e-cigarette mimics the experience of smoking tobacco cigarettes more closely than other quitting options, like nicotine gum or patches. You don't want to successfully give up smoking only to find you're now hooked on e-cigarettes.

If you've already tried using e-cigs and think you might be getting dependent on nicotine, you'll need to follow the same steps for quitting as you would with tobacco:

- **Make a specific plan.** Set a date to begin the quitting process. If you smoke cigarettes, try going cold turkey before relying on e-cigarettes to help. If that doesn't work, it's time for a plan to wean yourself off

nicotine. Make a specific goal, like using one less e-cigarette each day for a week. Keep cutting back until you no longer smoke or vape.

- **Stay busy.** Take your mind off cigarettes by exercising or doing something that involves your hands, like art, music, knitting, or woodworking. Stay aware of specific times and situations that make you want cigarettes (like at a party or after a meal), and come up with a plan to handle those times.
- **Delay giving in to a craving.** When you crave a cigarette or e-cig, put off giving in to the urge. It can be easier to tell yourself to "wait" than to tell yourself "no." Do something else to take your mind off the craving. Chances are, the urge will pass, and — congratulations — that means one less cigarette!
- **Keep focused on why you want to quit.** Write down all the reasons you want to stop using cigarettes or e-cigarettes, like the money you'll save or the extra energy you'll have. Keep the list where you can see it. Read it every day, even though you already know the reasons. Doing this helps your brain automatically remind you of a reason when you feel a strong craving.
- **Get support.** Turn to your family or a trusted adult for moral support when you really want a cigarette. It also helps strengthen your resolve to tell other people that you are quitting. If you don't want friends and family to know you smoke or use e-cigs, join an online or in-person support group. See if friends will join you in quitting. If not, ask them not to smoke or use e-cigarettes in front of you.
- **Be good to yourself.** Some people use e-cigs to avoid harming friends and family with secondhand smoke. But secondhand vapor is also problematic, and you're still hurting them by harming someone they love — you. Be your own best friend and give yourself praise each time you avoid reaching for the e-cigs.

Nicotine is an addictive drug. It's almost never easy to quit using it once you've started. The best strategy is to never start in the first place. If it's too late for that, remind yourself that it is possible to quit. Other people succeed, and so can you!

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