

Patient Information: Considerations for switching to E-cigarettes to quit smoking

Quitting smoking can be challenging. While wanting to quit may be easy, finding an effective way to successfully quit can be difficult. Proven and approved methods to help quit include nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), prescribed medications, and behavioral counseling. You may have tried one or more of these in the past without success and don't know what to try next.

E-cigarettes

An alternative method to smoking was introduced in the U.S. in 2007 – electronic cigarettes, also known as e-cigarettes or e-cigs. E-cigarettes deliver nicotine through heating a liquid that creates an aerosol that users inhale (called vaping). In contrast, traditional cigarettes deliver nicotine through burning tobacco to generate smoke, which exposes smokers to far more harmful chemicals than those generated by vaping an e-cigarette. To reduce their health risks from smoking, many people have switched to e-cigarettes to cut back or completely quit smoking.

While we know a lot about the health risks of traditional smoking, we know less about the health risks of using e-cigarettes. There is now reasonable evidence that e-cigarettes are less harmful than continuing to smoke traditional cigarettes and that using e-cigarettes can help some people quit smoking. However, e-cigarettes are not completely harmless, which is why people who do not smoke should not use them. There is still a lot to learn about the overall harms of using e-cigarettes and other vaping devices, especially using them for a long time.

Here's what we know:

- Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the U.S.
- Traditional cigarette smoke contains nearly 7,000 chemicals, about 70 that cause cancer. These chemicals are what cause illness and death from smoking.
- Nicotine in tobacco products is highly addictive, making quitting a challenge, but it is other chemicals in tobacco smoke (not the nicotine) that causes most tobacco-related disease.
- E-cigarettes contain nicotine, so using these devices can be just as addictive as smoking traditional cigarettes.
- E-cigarettes expose users to fewer harmful chemicals than smoking traditional cigarettes does.
- E-cigarettes do contain toxic materials that transport irritants through aerosol to the respiratory system (lungs).
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that smokers are more likely to use e-cigarettes in quit attempts than any other product, including smoking cessation medications approved by the FDA, and with greater success.
- There is high quality evidence that e-cigarettes increase smoking cessation for at least 6 months compared to NRT.

What we recommend for quitting:

- FDA-approved products and medications, including nicotine-replacement therapy (NRT), such as gum, patches, and lozenges, and prescribed medicines (Varenicline, Bupropion). If using a single medication type isn't working, talk to your doctor about combining medication types:
 - Varenicline **or** bupropion + NRT is more effective than any of these medications used alone.

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- Varenicline **and** bupropion used together may also be considered, as some evidence suggests the combination is more effective than varenicline used alone.
- Behavioral interventions, such as counseling, and digital interventions, such as web-based material, mobile apps, and text message programs.
- **Combining products and/or medications with behavioral support is more effective than using one method alone to quit.**

While we do not explicitly recommend you use e-cigarettes to stop smoking, if you are thinking about doing so, we encourage you to follow these guidelines:

- Switch completely to e-cigarettes, don't continue to use traditional cigarettes.
- Use your vaping device in the same way as you do with traditional cigarettes, don't change your behavior. For example:
 - Use outdoors and follow the same distance requirements for traditional smoking.
 - Avoid using 'whenever, wherever'.
 - Only use when you previously would during breaks at work, school, or your scheduled smoking breaks.
- Focus on your goal to completely quit cigarettes – set a quit date to help you stay on track.
- Talk with your provider about your use of e-cigarettes to quit. Together, you can figure out a plan for adjusting your device to taper down on your nicotine dose during your quit process.

Common questions and answers about e-cigs and vaping

With the information available on e-cigarettes and vaping, it can be hard to know what's good and what's bad. Here are some common questions and answers that might help. Please talk with your provider if you'd like to quit and have questions.

Q: Can switching to e-cigarettes help me quit smoking?

There is good evidence that e-cigarettes are better than NRT at increasing quit rates from cigarette smoking for at least 6 months. However, most people who have quit smoking using e-cigarettes will continue to use e-cigarettes for 6 months or longer. Using both e-cigarettes and traditional cigarettes is not advised – it may increase your risk of harm and make it harder to quit cigarettes.

Q: Is vaping safer than smoking cigarettes?

Traditional cigarettes contain nearly 7,000 chemicals, with about 70 that are known to cause cancer. These chemicals are what cause illness and death from smoking. E-cigarettes contain fewer harmful chemicals than traditional cigarettes and switching for a short time likely has far fewer risks than continuing to smoke cigarettes. While e-cigarettes expose people to fewer chemicals, we don't know the health effects of using these devices long term. For this reason, we recommend against long-term use of e-cigarettes.

Q: If I want to quit, do I switch to vaping all at once or do I use both at first and gradually stop smoking cigarettes?

If you choose to use e-cigarettes to quit smoking, it's best to plan to switch completely and stop smoking traditional cigarettes as quickly as possible. If you use both at first, set a quit date to stop cigarettes within a week or so. Continuing to smoke cigarettes will not reduce your health risks as much as a complete switch because smoking even one cigarette daily increases your cardiovascular risk.

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Q: What brand or flavor of vape juice is least harmful?

The health risks and long-term effects of liquids used in vaping devices are unknown. There is no evidence to show if certain brands or flavors of vape juices are safer than others. This does not mean these chemicals are safe, just that more research is needed to understand their risks.

Q: Should I switch to vaping while I'm pregnant? Is that safer than smoking cigarettes?

Quitting altogether is the safest thing for an unborn baby. There isn't evidence on the effects of e-cigarettes on the baby during pregnancy.

There is good evidence that behavioral interventions increase smoking cessation in late pregnancy and reduce the risk of having a baby with low birthweight. Please talk with your provider about the safest ways to quit during pregnancy.

Q: Is vaping safe to do inside my house? Will second-hand vaping harm my kids?

Exposure to aerosol (vapor) from e-cigarettes may expose non-users to nicotine, but research indicates that secondhand aerosol results in substantially lower exposure to toxins and carcinogens than cigarette smoke. However, exposure among vulnerable populations, including pregnant women and children, could still be dangerous. Also remember that children watch adults to see what they're doing and sometimes copy what they see. Consider the behaviors you're modeling for your children if you smoke or vape.