

Electronic cigarettes

Electronic cigarettes were first introduced in 2004 and have become increasingly popular since a public smoking ban was introduced in the UK in 2007. The use of electronic devices, or 'vaping', has increased rapidly and the electronic cigarette market is continuing to develop. Many different types of electronic cigarette exist, some of which contain a liquid (known as e-liquid) in a sealed cartridge and some of which use a tank. These tanks can then be filled with the user's choice of e-liquid, which varies in terms of flavour and nicotine concentration.

When an electronic cigarette user sucks on the device, the air flow activates a heating element. This heats and evaporates the nicotine-containing e-liquid, and the vapour is then inhaled by the user. As well as usually containing nicotine, the liquid in electronic cigarettes includes flavouring, additives and propylene glycol and/or glycerol.

Harm caused by conventional tobacco smoking is primarily caused through the toxins produced by the burning of tobacco. However, electronic cigarettes are not tobacco products and because no combustion is involved in their use, they do not create smoke. Electronic cigarettes, also known as vapourisers and e-cigarettes or e-cigs, are battery powered and they deliver nicotine without most of the toxic effects of tobacco smoke.

If used as intended, electronic cigarettes are less harmful than conventional cigarettes. However, they are not risk free, and currently there are no published studies about the long-term health impact of using them. They are popular with smokers and have a role to play in reducing smoking rates, although evidence is still developing on how effective they are as stop smoking aids. The use of licensed nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) such as patches, gum or other licensed stop smoking medication, combined with behavioural support from a Stop Smoking Service, remains the most effective way to quit smoking.

However, whilst quitting all forms of nicotine is the best option for smokers, many smokers are finding e-cigarettes helpful. Help2Quit welcomes everyone who wants to stop smoking and will provide behavioural support to those who wish to use unlicensed, self-purchased products, whether used in combination with or instead of licensed stop smoking medication. Costs vary between £20 - £70 for a good quality starter kit, although an e-cigarette will work out cheaper than smoking. As with other consumables, you pay more for better quality products.

Quitting smoking completely and for good is still the single most important thing smokers can do for their health. If using an electronic cigarette helps you quit and stay smokefree, current evidence suggests this will be safer for you than continuing to smoke.

Electronic cigarettes: FAQs

Is nicotine dangerous?

Nicotine is addictive, but it does not cause smoking related disease such as cancers and heart disease. These are caused by some of the other ingredients found in tobacco smoke, which contains over 4,000 chemicals.

Are e-cigarettes safe?

E-cigarettes are less harmful than smoking conventional tobacco cigarettes. However, they are not regulated in the same way that approved nicotine replacement therapies (NRT) such as patches and gum are. This means they haven't undergone all the tests needed to ensure their safety and effectiveness. There have also been reported cases of e-cigarettes being linked to house fires but as with any rechargeable device, it is important to use the correct charger and not leave it unattended whilst charging.

Are there any adverse health effects of e-cigarettes?

Good quality and reliable information about the long-term health risks of repeated vapour exposure in humans is lacking. Electronic cigarettes are not completely risk free as the vapour they produce contains some toxins, but on the available evidence, using an e-cigarette is less harmful than smoking.

Can e-cigarettes be used during pregnancy?

E-cigarettes are less harmful than smoking tobacco, but we don't know how safe or unsafe breathing in e-cigarette vapour is for your unborn baby. Pregnant mums are advised to use licensed NRT products which have been tested and are considered safe to use in pregnancy. However, if using an electronic cigarette helps you stay smokefree, current evidence suggests this is safer than continuing to smoke.

What about secondhand e-cigarette vapour?

Secondhand vapour can expose non-users to nicotine and other toxins, but at much lower levels than those found in secondhand tobacco smoke. There is currently no evidence of harm to bystanders from exposure to electronic cigarette vapour.

Can e-cigarettes be used in places where conventional smoking is not permitted?

Currently, there is no national legislation preventing or restricting the use of e-cigarettes in the UK; some places allow it but many do not. Shropshire Council policy, which is supported by Help2Change, prohibits the use of e-cigarettes wherever smoking is prohibited.

Links to National Guidance

Public Health England
Action on Smoking and Health
National Centre for Smoking Cessation Training
Smoking in Pregnancy Challenge Group

[E-cigarettes - An Evidence Update](#)
[Electronic Cigarettes](#)
[E-cigs: A briefing for Stop Smoking Services](#)
[Use of Electronic Cigarettes in Pregnancy](#)