

A look at e-cigarettes



E-cigarettes are called by different names: vape pens, e-hookahs, or mods, for example. They can come in a variety of shapes and designs and may look like real cigarettes, USB drives, or pipes.

E-cigarettes are different from cigarettes in that they do not burn tobacco. Instead, they have a battery that heats up a liquid, creating the fine mist or aerosol that is inhaled.

WHAT AM I INHALING?

Depending on the liquid and the device, the aerosol can contain nicotine, flavorings, and sometimes tiny metal particles like tin or lead that can be inhaled deeply into the lungs.¹ It also can contain chemicals that are known to cause cancer or serious lung diseases like asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.^{2,3}

Nicotine

Some studies have shown the amount of nicotine delivered by e-cigarettes can be greater than the amount that is stated on the label.¹ In fact, some products labeled as “nicotine-free” actually have been shown to contain nicotine.^{1,3,4}

Nicotine can be harmful in a number of ways. For example, it has been shown to cause problems in thinking, remembering things, or paying attention.¹ This is especially important for young e-cigarette users because the brain develops significantly from the teen years through the early 20s.¹

Nicotine also has been shown to affect the heart and circulatory system. Researchers have found that people who use e-cigarettes may have a higher blood pressure, and their hearts may beat faster than people who don’t use them.¹

SAFETY

E-cigarettes can cause other problems. There have been some cases of e-cigarettes exploding or catching fire—either while being used or when the battery is being charged.¹

Also, the nicotine in refill bottles can be poisonous if it is swallowed.¹ Young children, who may mistake the liquid for sweets, are especially at risk.

E-CIGARETTES AND ORAL HEALTH

Your oral health may be affected by e-cigarettes, too. Nicotine products, for example, have been associated with increased risk of developing severe gum disease,⁵ which can result in tooth loss.

In addition, the potential for an e-cigarette to catch fire or explode while being used puts you at risk for injuries to the mouth or face.⁶

CONCLUSIONS

More research is needed to see how e-cigarettes affect your health. We know, however, that the aerosol inhaled with e-cigarettes can contain nicotine and cancer-causing chemicals. Also, there have been reports that the e-cigarette itself can explode or catch fire.

Think about the possible ways e-cigarettes could affect your oral or overall health before picking up the habit. ■

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