For the Patient

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. It also can contain chemicals that are known to cause cancer or serious lung diseases like asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.4

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. 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. 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.7

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