

# E-cigarettes (vapes) explained

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NHS guidance recommends e-cigarettes (also known as vapes) to people who wish to stop smoking, or who are trying to cut down. Electronic cigarettes are used by many people to stay smoke free after they have successfully quit smoking.

## How e-cigarettes work

E-cigarettes allow you to inhale nicotine in a vapour rather than smoke. They work by heating a solution (e-liquid) that typically contains nicotine, propylene glycol and/or vegetable glycerine (safe colourless liquids with a slightly sweet taste that are used in many foods and household items), and flavourings. It is possible to use an e-liquid that does not contain nicotine. Using an e-cigarette is called vaping.

NICE guidance recommends the use of e-cigarettes for smokers as a means of quitting.

When you transition entirely to e-cigarettes from conventional cigarettes you are no longer classed as a smoker.

There are many different types of e-cigarettes. Find further information on pages 4 and 5.

## Benefits experienced when using an e-cigarette instead of smoking tobacco products

- E-cigarettes are 95% less harmful to health than tobacco. They don't contain tar or produce carbon monoxide, two of the many damaging ingredients in cigarette smoke.
- Exposure to second hand smoke is harmful to health. There is no evidence that vaping causes harm to other people around you because what is released is just water vapour.
- E-cigarettes can help you to manage your nicotine cravings. Many models allow you to change the e-liquid so you can tailor the nicotine dose to your individual need.
- A major UK clinical trial in 2019 found that, when combined with expert face-to-face support, people who used e-cigarettes to quit smoking were twice as likely to succeed as people who used other nicotine replacement products, such as patches or gum.



- The 2019 trial also found that 18% of participants using e-cigarettes were still smoke free after one year.
- People who never thought they could quit smoking manage to achieve this when using an e-cigarette. Some users report that the experience of using an e-cigarette is more enjoyable than smoking tobacco.
- E-cigarettes can be more effective in helping with tobacco withdrawal symptoms than nicotine replacement therapy.
- Using an e-cigarette can save you money compared with smoking conventional cigarettes.

## Safety of e-cigarettes

There is a comprehensive system of regulation in the UK. It includes minimum standards of safety and quality, detailed notification of ingredients and labelling requirements.

E-cigarettes provide a lower risk of fire compared with conventional cigarettes, which are the second highest cause of house fires in the UK each year. As with other electrical products, e-cigarettes must be used safely.

To minimise the risk of fire caused by e-cigarettes:

- always use the correct charger for the device
- don't leave an e-cigarette charging unattended or overnight
- don't carry an e-cigarette in a pocket next to coins or keys
- always buy e-cigarette products from a reputable retailer to make sure they are compliant with UK safety regulations

## The next step

If you make the decision to use an e-cigarette, it is important to choose the right strength of nicotine e-liquid to satisfy your needs. Devices that deliver nicotine more effectively and quickly are likely to give you a better chance of quitting smoking.

We recommend that you contact your local stop smoking service or speak with your local e-cigarette (vape) retailer for advice.

The Tobacco Dependence Team at King's College Hospital is available to offer advice and support. Contact them via:

Tel: 020 3299 2600

Email: [kch-tr.tobaccodependenceteam@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.tobaccodependenceteam@nhs.net)

Find your local stop smoking service via  
[www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking](http://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking)

If you do not have access to the internet, ask your NHS clinician to refer you to your local stop smoking service.

## Types of e-cigarettes that are available

### Cig-a-likes

**Features:** Similar look to tobacco cigarettes.

Small batteries. Disposable or rechargeable.

**Benefits:** Easy to use, useful as a first step away from smoking cigarettes.

**Limitations:** Less effective than more sophisticated types of e-cigarettes.



### Vape pens

**Features:** Shaped like a pen or small tube. Transparent tank to store e-liquid.

**Benefits:** Varied flavours, strengths and replaceable coils. Rechargeable. Batteries last longer than cig-a-likes. More effective for heavy smokers (20+ daily). Refill liquid is inexpensive. The vape e-tank systems become cheaper than using a cig-a-like.



## Mods

**Features:** Refillable tank. Range of shapes and sizes. Largest e-cig devices.

**Benefits:** Longer lasting rechargeable batteries. Design allows for more modifications and substitution of individual components.



## Pod systems

**Features:** Compact rechargeable devices, often shaped like a USB stick. Operate with pre-filled or refillable e-liquid pods.

**Benefits:** They are simple to use and to maintain.



## Sources

- Professor Peter Hajek and Tower Hamlets Stop Smoking Service
- Using e-cigarettes to stop smoking - NHS ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk))
- Evidence review of e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products 2018: executive summary - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))
- Randomized Trial of E-Cigarettes versus Nicotine Replacement Therapy, Hajek, Peter, et al 2019



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PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS:

Tel: **020 3299 3601**

Email: **[kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net)**

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND

Tel: **01689 863252**

Email: **[kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net)**

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