

E CIGARETTES

Can smoking be safe?



Electronic cigarettes are battery powered devices that are able to simulate tobacco smoking by producing a vapour that resembles smoke. These devices have a heating element which vaporizes a liquid solution - and this is what creates the smoke. Exactly what is in the liquid solution? Some of the solutions do have nicotine mixed with other flavourings - but other solutions produce vapours that contain no nicotine at all.

Many people have used e-cigarettes filled with harmless liquid solutions as a way of giving up smoking. They really stand behind the product - and feel that it's a great way to get over a terrible addiction.

But other people argue that the potential for abuse is too great and that e-cigarettes should be banned, or at least restricted. Solutions filled with nicotine, or with harder drugs, can be vaporized, making e-cigarettes potentially much more harmful than regular cigarettes. Even when e-cigarettes use "safe" solutions, these products still look and act a lot like regular cigarettes. Many parents worry that they could set a dangerous precedent for children.

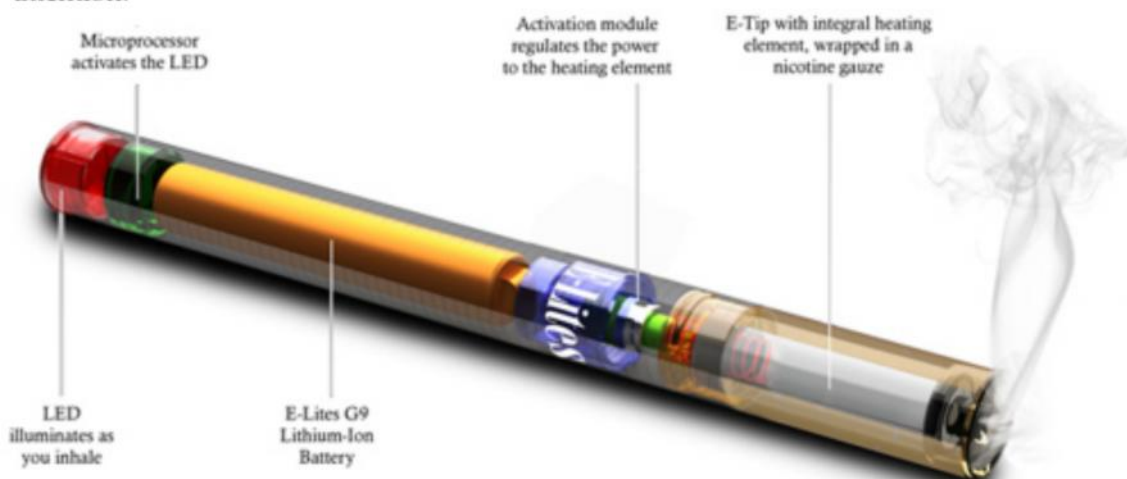


Creating A New Ritual

Years ago, I conducted an interview with a hypnotist who specialized in helping people to stop smoking. He pointed out to me that a big part of the addiction has to do with the “ritual” of smoking. People follow the same pattern every time they light up. They reach into their pocket or purse, pull out the case, pick out an individual cigarette, and then light it. The hypnotist gave his clients thought blocking techniques that could mimic the ritual of smoking. Instead of a cigarette case they would have a small writing pad in their pocket. In place of a cigarette, they would have a small pencil. Every time his clients wanted to light up, they would pull out the writing pad and pencil and start jotting down any of the dozens of reasons they needed to quit smoking. It gave them something to think about other than the ritual of smoking. A lot of smokers describe their addiction as a nervous habit, and point out that on one level they are bored and looking for something to do with their hands. The hypnotist would give them a yoyo to play with, or an elastic they could wind around in their fingers - it simply gave them another way to redirect their attention.

E-cigarettes don't merely mimic the ritual of smoking or create thought blocking techniques - they offer an almost perfect duplicate of the experience. The only difference lies in the fact that instead of inhaling toxic tobacco smoke, users are breathing in completely innocuous mist.

People who quit smoking usually find the first couple of weeks the hardest because their body craves nicotine. If they can make it for this long, they can get over the physical craving. But getting over the **psychological** craving is a different story. When they have a particularly stressful day, are around friends who are smoking, or are having a drink, many ex-smokers take up the habit again. They fall back into old patterns and experience a psychological craving for tobacco. E-cigarettes can certainly help out with these cravings. Provided they use a liquid solution that has no nicotine, e-cigarette users are engaging in a safe option that doesn't carry any health risks.



E-cigarettes And Dab

We mentioned earlier that the relative risks of e-cigarettes have a lot to do with the liquid solutions that are used in the cartridges. Some solutions contain nicotine, while others do not. But serious addiction issues have cropped up in recent years as some addicts use hash oil in their e-cigarettes. This hash oil has acquired the street name “dab” because so many users have taken to dabbing it on their e-cigarettes. The heating element on e-cigarettes vaporizes the hash oil instantly - and people using the product this way get a high that is much more intense than they would get from simply smoking marijuana. Moreover, it doesn’t have the telltale smell that marijuana has. Users can be standing a few feet away from you, and you would never have any idea that they are inhaling a potent drug until they start acting like goofs, that is!



Various types of hash oil formed into a wax or powder



Many schools and public buildings have taken to banning the use of e-cigarettes completely. They feel there is simply too much potential for abuse when people use these e-cigarettes to get high. They also worry about the second-hand smoke associated with the vapour from these devices.

E-Cigarettes and Children

Smoking rates have dropped dramatically in the last couple of decades thanks in large part to government efforts to “de-normalize” the smoking experience. We can’t smoke in restaurants, we can’t smoke in bars, we can’t smoke within 5 metres of the entrance to a building. Certain Hollywood movies have gone from a G rating to a PG 13 rating just because of the presence of cigarettes in the movie. As a society we don’t want the public - and we particularly don’t want young children - to think of smoking as cool!

This is where one of the problems with e-cigarettes pop up. They look just like cigarettes. The end lights up, just like cigarettes. Smoke comes out of them, just like cigarettes. It may not be toxic second-hand smoke full of carcinogens, but it still looks just the same. Many concerned parents' groups feel that e-cigarettes will be the gateway to tobacco use (just as they feared tobacco might be the gateway drug for marijuana, or marijuana might be the gateway drug for cocaine).

It may sound as if these groups are being unduly harsh in their criticism of e-cigarettes. But it is important to remember that up until a few years ago, candy cigarettes were a popular product for children. They were long and thin and looked very similar to cigarettes, right down to the red tip painted on the end. Some brands of candy cigarettes even emitted a puff of smoke - which naturally made kids using them think they were awesome! Concerned parents, legislators, and even the candy industry itself eventually came to the realization that a product that glorified smoking to children was harmful. The red tip on the end of the candy was removed, and these days they are relabelled as "candy sticks" instead of candy cigarettes.



The point of all this is that while e-cigarettes often help adults **quit** smoking. We can't be sure that they won't encourage kids to **start** smoking. Kids are a lot more naïve and impressionable. If they start using e-cigarettes to stand out and look like rebels, it's not much of a step for them to switch to regular cigarettes.



Legislation

So what is the answer to the e-cigarette conundrum. Frankly, it looks like the only thing we can do is exactly what governments, school boards and police forces have already started doing, treating e-cigarettes exactly like regular cigarettes. Just like cigarettes, users won't be able to use them in bars, restaurants and public buildings. They will have to step outside to have their e-cigarette, just like people with regular cigarettes.

Those who use e-cigarettes as a stop-smoking technique are up in arms and insist they should be able to use them in

restaurants (provided the solution they are using is completely harmless). But there is absolutely no way the staff in those restaurants can verify what is actually in the solution.

At the end of the day, people who use e-cigarettes in order to stop smoking are doing it for their own health, not for the convenience of people around them. If they have to step outside to have an e-cigarette, so be it. They would still have to step outside if they smoking regular cigarettes!

E-Cigarettes 3 strikes. You're out.



1 IN YOUR BRAIN

You think e-cigs help you quit real cigarettes. There's no evidence of this.

2 IN THE VAPOR

ACETONE AND XYLENE. Nail polish remover and paint thinner? You're going to breathe that? Really? And what about the friends next to you?

3 IN THE CARTRIDGE

NITROSAMINES. Known carcinogens. That means it causes cancer.

FORMALDEHYDE. Highly toxic to all animals, including you. Good for embalming dead bodies. Causes cancer.