
Supporting smokers to switch to vaping.

> What is vaping?

Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) were designed to help people stop smoking tobacco. There are many sorts of e-cigarette. E-cigarettes contain a battery, a heating element and either a cartridge containing e-liquid or a 'tank' that can be filled with e-liquid with or without nicotine.

When an e-cigarette is used, the e-liquid is heated creating a vapour that can be inhaled. If the e-liquid contains nicotine, droplets of nicotine in the vapour are 'inhaled' into the mouth and throat, and depending on the depth of inhalation, the lungs, for absorption into the blood stream.

The act of using an e-cigarette is called vaping.

> Why vape instead of smoking?

Many smokers have heard about e-cigarettes and are interested in trying them. Some hope that they will be able to stop smoking altogether. Others are looking for a way to alleviate withdrawal symptoms brought on by not being able to smoke in places where smoking is banned. Some smokers who at first smoke and vape (dual use) find that, after a period of time, they lose interest in smoking tobacco - they become "accidental quitters".

Vaping, even with nicotine, is around 95% safer than smoking tobacco¹. This is an important message as people are being led to believe that vaping is just as harmful as smoking. Vaping is not a form of smoking. If a person is vaping and not smoking they have given up smoking. Stopping smoking, no matter how they achieve that, is the best thing they can do for their health.

It is best if pregnant women stop smoking without using nicotine but switching to e-cigarettes with nicotine is better than continuing to smoke. Vaping without nicotine might aid abstinence from smoking and could be recommended if a pregnant woman who smokes cannot stop 'cold turkey'.

> Is vaping legal?

Vaping is legal in New Zealand.

Nicotine that is not in tobacco and not registered as a medicine cannot be imported for sale or distribution within New Zealand under the Smoke-free Environments Act (1990).

It is legal to import nicotine e-liquid for personal use. Up to 3 months supply for personal use can be imported in one delivery.

> How to switch from smoking to vaping?

Some smokers start by experimenting with vaping while they are still smoking. Some smokers begin vaping and find they don't need to smoke anymore. If a smoker is interested in vaping, encourage them to try it.

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Until they try vaping with nicotine, they won't know whether they can switch completely at once, or whether they need some time vaping and smoking while they get the hang of vaping. People who vape and reduce their smoking may have less smoking-related illness symptoms. To support their progression to total abstinence from smoking, encourage them to vape every day, even if they start with replacing some cigarettes with vaping in a gradually increasing manner.

If they do not progress wholly to vaping instead of smoking, they may not be getting enough nicotine from their vaping and or they may not be vaping for long enough at a time or in an effective way. It can take 2-3 months for a new vaper to learn how to vape efficiently, assess which nicotine strength to use and work out which flavours are satisfying for them but good advice and guidance will increase the likelihood of completely switching from smoking to vaping.

Negative behaviour from others about vaping and negative information in the media about vaping can scare people off vaping and back to smoking. Encourage vapers to talk to you if they have any concerns.

> **What strength nicotine should be used?**

To increase the chance of completely switching from smoking to vaping, vapers need to get enough nicotine. If they do not get enough nicotine to satisfy their current level of addiction to nicotine, they will experience withdrawal symptoms, such as feeling irritable and grumpy. Nicotine withdrawals could drive them to smoke a cigarette.

It is best to start on a higher strength nicotine e-liquid than indicated by how much people say they smoke. For example, a 15 a day smoker who smokes within an hour of waking up should start on at least 18mg/ml. A light smoker on 6 cigarettes a day who does not smoke until after 1 hour after waking should start on at least 12mg/ml. A heavy smoker on 30 or more cigarettes a day who smokes soon after waking up may need at least 24mg/ml. Err on the side of a greater concentration of nicotine. There is no danger of accidental overdose by inhalation.

E-liquids are available in a range of strengths and flavours:

- No nicotine 0mg/ml
- Low 3mg - 6mg
- Medium 12 - 18mg
- High 24mg
- Very high 36mg/ml and above

If you can, follow-up to make sure new vapers are getting the hang of vaping and are getting enough nicotine. Check that new vapers are puffing enough especially after waking. Many new vapers start with tobacco flavours which helps with the transition from smoking to vaping. Within the first few months they will want to experiment with non-tobacco flavours which should be encouraged. The sooner vaping becomes a satisfying experience the more likely people are to stick with it.

> **When to stop using nicotine?**

Nicotine is not the harmful component of smoking – tar and carbon monoxide and other cancer causing toxins in smoke are the killers. If a person wants to eventually stop using nicotine, they can wean themselves off by stepping down to a lower strength nicotine e-liquid.

Nicotine is not the harmful component of cigarettes

First they need to get used to vaping and keep using nicotine until vaping has totally replaced smoking and they feel confident that they are not at risk of relapsing to smoking. This could take anything from 3 months to 2 years until they feel confident of not returning to smoking.

There is no proven need to stop using nicotine, though it is advisable that pregnant women try to abstain from nicotine while pregnant and breastfeeding. While the healthiest option may be neither to smoke, nor vape, it is much safer to vape nicotine than it is to smoke tobacco.

> What type of e-cigarette?

The first e-cigarettes on the market looked like a cigarette. They were fully disposable or had replaceable cartridges. Newer e-cigarettes have a long pen like shape, or a squat square battery upon which sits a refillable tank with mouthpiece. E-cigarettes vary in length and size and colour. The best e-cigarettes for helping people totally switch from smoking to vaping are those with refillable tanks and rechargeable batteries. Latest cylinder shaped or box shaped e-cigarettes can best be modified to meet vapers' needs and tastes.

> How much do they cost?

Starter kits can be bought with 1 or 2 complete e-cigarettes with a USB and a three point charger, case and a bottle of nicotine e-liquid. Prices for a good quality single e-cigarette starter kit range from about \$60. Once a person has their starter kit, the main ongoing cost will be for the e-liquid.

A 30ml bottle costs about \$25 and this could last a 20 cigarettes-a-day smoker about 1 month depending on the atomiser used and frequency of use. It is recommended that people buy at least a 2nd battery as a back-up. Some e-cigarettes have replaceable parts like the heating elements, which will need to be replaced about fortnightly depending on frequency of use.

Some retailers provide phone or Internet support, which is useful for new vapers. New e-cigarette models require maintenance which new users might not know about.

> Concerns about vaping

E-cigarettes have electronic components. People should avoid using non-standard or non-compatible chargers with their e-cigarette batteries, due to the potential risk of sparking or fire.

Vapers should check that their e-liquids are in containers with childproof tops, and stored out of reach of children.

People worry that e-cigarettes can be used for cannabis or other drugs. E-cigarettes were designed to vaporise liquids with relatively low viscosity. Oils will break or clog the device. Products claiming to contain cannabinoids or synthetic cannabis would be covered by the Psychoactive Substances Act in New Zealand and would be illegal to import, sell and distribute.