

E-cigarettes can help smokers to quit, new research shows

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People attempting to quit smoking without professional help are approximately 60% more likely to report succeeding if they use e-cigarettes than if they use willpower alone or over-the-counter nicotine replacement therapies such as patches or gum, finds a large UCL (University College London) survey of smokers in England. The results were adjusted for a wide range of factors that might influence success at

quitting, including age, nicotine dependence, previous quit attempts, and whether quitting was gradual or abrupt.

The study, published in *Addiction*, surveyed 5,863 smokers between 2009 and 2014 who had attempted to quit smoking without the aid of prescription medication or professional support. 20% of people trying to quit with the aid of e-cigarettes reported having stopped smoking conventional cigarettes at the time of the survey.

The research, chiefly funded by Cancer Research UK, suggests that e-cigarettes could play a positive role in reducing smoking rates. "E-cigarettes could substantially improve public health because of their widespread appeal and the huge health gains associated with stopping smoking," says Professor Robert West of UCL's Department of Epidemiology & Public Health, senior author of the study. "However, we should also recognise that the strongest evidence remains for use of the NHS stop-smoking services. These almost triple a smoker's odds of successfully quitting compared with going it alone or relying on over-the-counter products."

Another survey by the same team found that most e-cigarette use involves first generation 'cigalike' products rather than second generation ones that use refillable cartridges and a wider choice of nicotine concentrations and flavors. Dr Jamie Brown of UCL's Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology, lead author of both reports, says: "We will continue to monitor success rates in people using e-cigarettes to stop smoking to see whether there are improvements as the devices become more advanced."

Some e-cigarette users may want to continue using them indefinitely. "It is not clear whether long-term use of e-cigarettes carries health risks but from what is known about the contents of the vapour these will be much less than from smoking," says Professor West.

"Some public health experts have expressed concern that widespread use of e-cigarettes could 're-normalise' smoking. However, we are tracking this very closely and see no evidence of it. Smoking rates in England are declining, quitting rates are increasing and regular e-cigarette use among never smokers is negligible."

More information: Brown, Beard, Kotz, Michie & West, 'Real-world effectiveness of e-cigarettes when used to aid smoking cessation: a cross-sectional population study', *Addiction*, May 2014, Wiley, [DOI: 10.1111/add.12623](https://doi.org/10.1111/add.12623)

Provided by Wiley

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