

# E-cigarettes significantly reduce tobacco cravings

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Electronic cigarettes offer smokers a realistic way to kick their tobacco smoking addiction. In a new study published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, scientists at KU Leuven report that e-cigarettes successfully reduced cravings for tobacco cigarettes, with only minimal side effects.

Electronic cigarettes (e-cigs) were developed as a less harmful alternative to tobacco cigarettes. They contain 100 to 1,000 times less toxic substances and emulate the experience of smoking a tobacco cigarette.

In an 8-month study, the KU Leuven researchers examined the effect of using e-cigs ("vaping") in 48 participants, all of whom were smokers with no intention to quit. The researchers' goal was to evaluate whether e-cigs decreased the urge to smoke tobacco cigarettes in the short term, and whether e-cigs helped people stop smoking altogether in the long-term.

The participants were divided into three groups: two e-cig groups, which were allowed to vape and smoke tobacco cigarettes for the first two months of the study, and a [control group](#) that only had access to tobacco. In a second phase of the study, the control group was given e-cigs and all participants were monitored for a period of six months via a web tool, where they regularly logged their vaping and smoking habits.

In the lab, the e-cigs proved to be just as effective in suppressing the craving for a smoke as tobacco cigarettes were, while the amount of exhaled carbon monoxide remained at baseline levels. In the long-term analysis, results showed that the smokers were more likely to trade in their tobacco cigarettes for e-cigs and taper off their tobacco use.

At the end of the 8-month study, 21% of all participants had stopped smoking tobacco entirely (verified via a CO test), whereas an additional 23% reported cutting the number of tobacco cigarettes they smoked per day by half.

Across all three groups, the number of [tobacco cigarettes](#) smoked per day decreased by 60%.

"All the groups showed similar results after we introduced the e-cigs," concluded Professor Frank Baeyens and postdoctoral researcher Dinska Van Gucht of the Psychology of Learning and Experimental Psychopathology Unit. "With guidance on practical use, the nicotine e-cig offers many smokers a successful alternative for smoking less - or even quitting altogether. E-cig users get the experience of [smoking](#) a cigarette and inhale nicotine vapor, but do not suffer the damaging effects of a tobacco cigarette."

"By comparison: of all the smokers who quit using nothing but willpower, only 3 to 5% remain smoke-free for 6 to 12 months after quitting," says Baeyens.

Nicotine e-cigs are currently banned in Belgium. In light of their study results, the researchers are now urging for a new legal framework for nicotine vaping in Belgium. All neighboring countries allow the sale of nicotine e-cigs.

**More information:** *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, [www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/11/11/11220/htm](http://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/11/11/11220/htm)

Provided by KU Leuven

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