

E-cigarette use among college students—helpful aid or risky enabler?

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Electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) use continues to rise, and current data regarding use of e-cigarettes among college students are needed. The study, "Electronic Cigarette Use Among College Students: Links to Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Smoking, and Heavy Drinking" found in the *Journal of American College Health* connects e-cigarette use in colleges to high rates of alcohol consumption and other factors such as: gender, race/ethnicity and traditional cigarettes. The rise of e-cigarettes may be a positive consequence of cigarette smokers who use this product to quit smoking or to avoid the toxicity of traditional cigarettes. However, e-cigarette use does not always reflect an attempt to reduce cigarette smoking and may instead indicate a general propensity to use psychoactive substances, especially among emerging adults.

The purpose of this study was to examine e-cigarette use and the relation of such use with gender, race/ethnicity, traditional tobacco use, and [heavy drinking](#). A sample of 599 [college students](#) enrolled in General Psychology at a state university completed a self-report questionnaire. Twenty-nine percent of students reported prior use of e-cigarettes, with 14% reporting use in the past 30 days. E-cigarette use was linked to male gender but not to race/ethnicity. Dual use (i.e., concurrent use of both traditional and e-cigarettes) was related to heavier use of traditional and e-cigarettes, and nicotine use was linked to pronounced rates of heavy drinking.

The authors write: "The current findings suggest that e-cigarettes may represent another "tool in the tool chest" among college students with a

proclivity to use (and misuse) psychoactive substances."

Of most concern is the link between e-cigarette use and heavy drinking. "Although smoke-free legislation has led to several public health benefits, the increasing popularity and presence of e-cigarettes may allow college students to circumvent these bans and more readily co-use [alcohol](#) and nicotine. Several lines of evidence suggest that nicotine use (a) enhances the reinforcing effects of alcohol use, especially among men; (b) increases the duration of a drinking episode; and (c) leads to higher levels of cravings for both alcohol and cigarettes when co-used with alcohol. Further, alcohol and tobacco use disorders are prospectively linked in college students."

The results showed that e-cigarette use among college students is exponentially on the rise, and its co-use with alcohol may contribute to negative outcomes in this population.

More information: Andrew K. Littlefield et al. Electronic Cigarette Use Among College Students: Links to Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Smoking, and Heavy Drinking, *Journal of American College Health* (2015). [DOI: 10.1080/07448481.2015.1043130](https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2015.1043130)

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