

Vapers can avoid relapsing to smoking, even after the odd cigarette

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Lead researcher, Dr Caitlin Notley, from UEA's Norwich Medical School.
Credit: University of East Anglia

Smokers who switch to vaping don't lapse for long—according to new research from the University of East Anglia.

While vapers may occasionally have the odd smoking lapse, they don't

see it as 'game over' for their quit attempt and it doesn't have to lead to a full [relapse](#).

The findings, published in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Review*, suggest that vaping encourages not just smoking cessation, but long-term relapse prevention.

Lead researcher Dr. Caitlin Notley, from UEA's Norwich Medical School, said: "E-cigarettes are the most popular aid to quitting smoking in the UK. Our previous research has shown that [e-cigarettes](#) are really important for helping people stay smoke free—by substituting the physical, psychological and [social aspects](#) of smoking.

"We wanted to know what happens when people who have switched to vaping, lapse back into smoking.

"It's really important to understand this so that we can develop advice, guidance and support to help people stay smoke free long term—particularly as relapsing back to smoking cigarettes is so harmful."

The [research team](#) interviewed 40 people who had quit smoking by switching to vaping. Around half reported either brief or regular lapses to tobacco smoking (sometimes called 'dual use') - particularly in social situations.

They found that people think of smoking lapses differently when they have switched to vaping, compared to other quit attempts.

Dr. Notley said: "In the past—a brief smoking lapse would almost always lead to a full relapse, and people would usually feel like a failure for slipping up. But this was before people started switching to vaping.

"The difference is that, for some vapers, the odd cigarette was thought of as being 'allowed'. For others, an unintentional cigarette made them even more determined to maintain abstinence in future.

"Either way, it didn't necessarily lead to a full relapse back into smoking.

"Because vaping is a more pleasurable alternative, our research found that a full relapse into smoking isn't inevitable when people find themselves having the odd cigarette.

"There has been a lot of theorising around the process of [smoking](#) relapse after quit attempts. But all of these date back to pre-vaping times. This fresh evidence makes us question the usefulness of that understanding now that so many people are choosing to switch to vaping.

"For ex-smokers, [vaping](#) offers a pleasurable, social and psychological substitute to cigarettes—and it powerfully alters the threat of relapse. The old 'not a puff' advice may need revisiting."

More information: 'Vaping as an alternative to smoking relapse following brief lapse' *Drug and Alcohol Review*, November 29, 2018.

Provided by University of East Anglia

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