

Vaping is linked to heightened eating disorder risk among U.S. college students

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A new study published in the journal *Eating Behaviors* found that vaping or e-cigarette use is associated with a heightened risk of developing an eating disorder among US college students. This finding is particularly

important given the common use of vape pens and e-cigarettes and an increase in the prevalence of eating disorders amidst the COVID-19 pandemic among young people.

The study, which analyzed a sample of over 51,000 U.S. college students who participated in the 2018-2019 Healthy Minds Study, highlights the need for more research and clinical assessment and intervention for those who exhibit both substance use and eating disorders.

"The higher prevalence of vaping among those with eating disorder symptoms is concerning given that the co-occurrence of these behaviors can exacerbate physical health complications such as cardiovascular, pulmonary, and neurological problems," says lead author Kyle T. Ganson, Ph.D., MSW, assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work.

The researchers also found that participants who reported receiving an eating disorder diagnosis, such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa, over the course of their life had a higher prevalence of vaping or [e-cigarette use](#). Additionally, among those who reported vaping or [e-cigarette use](#), nicotine vaping was the most common to have been recently used among participants with and without eating disorder symptoms.

"Nicotine vaping may be used by individuals to support [eating disorder](#) behaviors and goals, such as suppressing appetite and catalyzing weight loss," says Ganson. "Nicotine vaping can lead to dependence and future polysubstance use."

"The study's findings are especially relevant as we have seen a surge in referrals for eating disorders and [substance use disorders](#) during the pandemic," said co-author Jason M. Nagata, MD, MSc, assistant professor at the University of California, San Francisco's Department of

Pediatrics. "Young people who are struggling with their eating or substance use should seek help from a health professional. Clinicians should screen [young people](#) for disordered eating and [substance use](#), especially during the pandemic."

The researchers emphasize the need for further clinical assessment of eating disorders among college students who report vaping or e-cigarette use, as well as additional federal and state regulation of vape pens and e-cigarettes to protect the health and well-being of young people.

More information: Kyle T. Ganson et al, Associations between vaping and eating disorder diagnosis and risk among college students, *Eating Behaviors* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.eatbeh.2021.101566](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2021.101566)

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