



Smoking, vaping and asthma

Smoking and asthma are a bad match

Cigarettes contain addictive nicotine and thousands of dangerous chemicals. When you breathe in these harmful chemicals, they irritate your airways and cause inflammation. Inflamed lungs produce more mucous, leading to more frequent asthma symptoms and severe asthma attacks.

Smoking and second-hand smoke (breathing in other people's smoke):

- damages your lungs
- makes your asthma harder to manage
- stops your asthma medications working properly
- increases your risk of asthma attacks or flare-ups.

Smoking also affects your immunity and makes it harder for your body to fight viruses and infections. This can increase the risk of infections, including bronchitis and pneumonia.

Smoking can also lead to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart disease and lung cancer.

A dangerous combination

People with asthma have even more reason to avoid smoking than those without asthma. Your lungs are extra sensitive when you have asthma and they are especially vulnerable to the damaging effects of cigarette smoke.

In the short term, smoking and asthma makes you more likely to have asthma flare-ups. In the long term, you're at higher risk of developing smoking-related diseases like emphysema.

Tobacco smoke is a major trigger for asthma. People with asthma and those around them should not smoke.



Second-hand smoke

There is no safe level of breathing in second-hand smoke. Even low levels of exposure, including in outdoor areas, can be harmful.

Children are particularly at risk of harm from second-hand tobacco smoke. This includes increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS or cot death), bronchitis, pneumonia and other lung/airways infections and asthma flare-ups.

Keep children smoke-free

Smoking around babies and children damages their lungs and worsens wheezing and asthma.

Protect your child's health by keeping your home and car smoke-free. Even smoke residue on your clothes, hair, or skin can be harmful.

Smoking or breathing in second-hand smoke during pregnancy can affect the development of your baby's lungs and can increase the risk of your child developing asthma.

If you're planning to become pregnant, both you and your partner should stop smoking before the pregnancy to protect your unborn baby.



E-cigarettes

E-cigarettes have been promoted as a safer alternative to tobacco cigarettes however this claim is untrue. While they do not contain tar, carbon monoxide, or some of the harmful chemicals found in tobacco smoke, e-cigarettes still expose users to a range of harmful substances.

E-cigarettes come in a variety of shapes and sizes and are commonly known as 'vapes'. They are battery-operated devices that contain a liquid. When this liquid is heated, it produces an aerosol that users breathe in.

Vaping

Smoking e-cigarettes is commonly known as 'vaping'. Vaping is harmful and highly addictive. Studies have shown that one vape can contain the same amount of nicotine as 50 cigarettes. Even vapes that don't contain nicotine still contain dangerous cancer-causing substances in the liquid and the aerosol.

Vaping rates have significantly increased since 2013, particularly in young people. Young people who vape are three times more likely to take up smoking compared to people who have never vaped. Health risks associated with vaping include:

- irritation of the mouth and airways
- coughing, respiratory problems and permanent lung damage
- lung cancer and oral cancer
- poisoning and seizures from inhaling too much nicotine or ingestion of e-liquid
- burns or injury caused by an e-cigarette overheating or exploding.

People with asthma should avoid vaping and second-hand inhalation of vapes, as it makes your asthma worse and can cause severe lung injury.

New evidence about how e-cigarettes affect asthma is emerging every day. There has been a large increase in vaping associated lung injury over the last 5 years. One study found that over 30% of patients who suffered permanent lung injury were people with asthma. Severe lung injury can be caused by lipoid pneumonia, which is a build-up of fats and lipids in the lungs. This occurs from



breathing in oils containing chemicals such as nicotine and artificial flavours in vapes.

Research is also underway on whether vapes can help people quit smoking tobacco cigarettes. However overall evidence of this is limited. Some studies show that vaping leads to future use of tobacco products and that it is not an effective way to quit smoking.

In 2024 the Australian Government banned the importation of disposable vapes and limited where they can be sold. Vapes are only available from pharmacies, with a prescription from a GP or nurse practitioner. It is illegal for shops like supermarkets, tobacconists and convenience stores to sell vapes.

Find out more about vaping at vapingfacts.org.au.

Nicotine pouches

In recent years, nicotine pouches have become more popular. They have been promoted as a way to help quit smoking or vaping however studies show that smokers end up becoming addicted to both pouches and smoking or vaping.

Nicotine pouches are also known as 'white snus', Zyn®, Velo®, ziz, lip pillow/cushies, nics and nicopods. They are small bags that contain nicotine, and sometimes also sweeteners and flavour. The pouches are placed in the mouth, next to the gum, where the nicotine is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream.

People with asthma should not use nicotine pouches. Even though they don't produce smoke or aerosol, that doesn't make them safe. Nicotine pouches often contain synthetic nicotine and additives that may be harmful to your body and can potentially worsen asthma symptoms.



Studies have shown that people who use nicotine pouches experienced more asthma symptoms than those who didn't. Young people who started using nicotine pouches during puberty were more likely to develop asthma and asthma symptoms, with the highest rates in females and those without smoking history. There is also emerging evidence that nicotine pouches have harmful impacts on adolescent brain development.

It is illegal for consumers to buy nicotine pouches online or from retail outlets. Tobacconists and convenience stores are not allowed to sell nicotine pouches.

Quitting smoking

It's never too late to quit smoking. People with asthma who quit smoking have healthier lungs within just 8 weeks.

There are many different methods to help you quit, including gum, patches, medication, coaching or going 'cold turkey'. Some people find that using a combination of these makes the difference.

Whichever strategy you choose, you don't have to do it alone – there are many ways to get help.

Speak to your doctor, pharmacist or primary health care nurse. They can give you advice and support to help you quit successfully.

Download asthma action plans



Download an allergy action plan



You can also get help from Quit:

- Call Quitline: 13 78 48.
- Visit the website: quit.org.au.
- Download the app: My QuitBuddy.

References and more information

- Alcohol and Drug Foundation: adf.org.au/insights/nicotine-pouches-australia/.
- Cancer Council: cancer.org.au/cancer-information/causes-and-prevention/smoking.
- Cancer Council: cancer.org.au/cancer-information/causes-and-prevention/smoking/e-cigarettes.
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