

# Did You Know?

**Nicotine can create dependence in cigarettes and vapes.**

Nicotine reaches the brain quickly and activates reward pathways. Repeated exposure can lead to dependence, meaning the brain and body adapt to regular nicotine and cravings or withdrawal can appear when nicotine levels fall.

## Nicotine, Vaping & Dependence

Cravings, withdrawal and why stopping can feel difficult.

### What nicotine does

Nicotine stimulates nicotinic acetylcholine receptors and increases dopamine signalling. The short cycle between nicotine use, falling nicotine levels and another dose can reinforce repeated smoking or vaping.

### Quick facts

**DEPENDENCE** Nicotine is the main addictive substance in tobacco.

**CRAVINGS** Urges can be linked to withdrawal as well as routines, emotions and cues.

**VAPING** Vaping is less harmful than smoking, but it is not risk-free.

**QUITTING** Evidence-based support can make stopping more manageable.

### IMPORTANT

Vapes can help adults stop smoking when used as a complete substitute, but people who do not smoke should not start vaping.

### Withdrawal can include

- Strong cravings
- Irritability or low mood
- Restlessness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sleep disturbance
- Increased appetite

### Why cravings return

A craving is not simply a lack of willpower. Nicotine withdrawal can combine with learned cues — after meals, driving, stress, alcohol, breaks at work or seeing someone else smoke or vape.

### Did you know?

Cravings usually rise and fall. Changing routines, delaying, distraction and nicotine-replacement or stop-smoking medicines can help some people manage the cycle.

### Smoking vs vaping

Smoking burns tobacco and exposes people to thousands of chemicals. NHS guidance states that vaping exposes users to fewer toxins and at lower levels than smoking.

### But vaping is not harmless

Long-term effects are still being studied. The healthiest option is not to smoke or vape; for an adult who smokes, switching completely to vaping can reduce harm compared with continuing to smoke.

### Want help to stop?

NHS Stop Smoking Services can provide behavioural support and discuss nicotine replacement, vaping and stop-smoking medicines. A pharmacist or GP can also advise.

Sources: [NHS Better Health](#) • [NHS vaping guidance](#) • [NICE tobacco guidance](#) | [Space to Breathe Therapy](#)