

Should we switch from tobacco to e-cigarettes?

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Smokers should be offered and encouraged to use e-cigarettes to help them quit, says a leading medical body. The UK's Royal College of Physicians says there is resounding evidence that e-cigarettes are much safer than smoking and aid quitting. With the right checks and measures, vaping could improve the lives of millions of people, it says in a new, 200-page report. It says fears that e-cigarettes are a gateway to smoking are unfounded.

UK doctors can only prescribe e-cigarettes if they have been licensed as a 'quit smoking aid' — something that requires strict regulation. Few manufacturers go down this route and instead sell products to satisfy users' desire for nicotine without the harmful chemicals produced by tobacco.

Best way to quit? Sales of e-cigarettes have been rising steadily since the first went on sale in 2007 in the UK. Since 2012, they have replaced nicotine patches and gum to become the most popular choice of smoking cessation aid in England.

Around one in 20 adults in England uses e-cigarettes and nearly all of these are ex-smokers or current smokers who are trying to cut down or quit.



E-cigarettes have remained controversial and this year ministers in Wales attempted to ban them from public places. The Royal College of Physicians says smokers who use e-cigarettes or prescribed medications — with support from their doctor — are more likely to quit permanently.

How e-cigarettes work?
1. On some e-cigarettes, inhalation activates the battery-powered atomiser. Other types are manually switched on.
2. A heating coil inside the

atomiser heats liquid nicotine contained in a cartridge.
3. The mixture becomes vapour and is inhaled. Many e-cigarettes have an LED light as a cosmetic feature to simulate traditional cigarette glow.

Different brands of e-cigarettes contain different chemical concentrations. Public Health England has also says that health hazards of e-cigarettes are at least 95% safer than regular cigarettes.

But that does not mean they are entirely risk-free. Prof Simon

Capewell, of the Faculty of Public Health, said that there were still many unknown factors. "We don't know enough yet about the long-term effects of vaping on people's health, which is why we need more research. But Prof John Britton, who co-authored the RCP report, says e-cigarettes are extremely positive for public health and should be "encouraged and endorsed". He said: "The public need to be reassured this is not a new nicotine epidemic in the making. E-cigarettes

have very little downside and a lot of potential benefit."

Around a third of UK smokers try to quit each year, but only one in every six of those succeeds. New EU laws are due to come into force in May that will set safety and quality standards for all e-cigarettes and refills. Manufacturers will be required to disclose the purity of their products to consumers.

A Department of Health spokesperson said: "The best thing a smoker can do for their health is to quit smoking." E-cigarettes can be addictive as it is the nicotine in them that can cause dependency.

There is also a fear that the widespread use of e-cigarettes will normalise the consumption of nicotine, undoing the social changes which resulted from the smoking ban and making smoking socially acceptable once more.

The British Medical Association is calling for a ban in public places, while the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA) considers that all governments should apply the precautionary principle and should implement an appropriate regulatory regime for e-cigarettes as products that have the potential to cause considerable harm to the public's health.

SYMPTOM CHECKER



What does a heart attack feel like?

A heart attack is a sudden and sometimes fatal occurrence of coronary thrombosis (blockage of the flow of blood to the heart, caused by a blood clot in an artery supplying to the heart), typically resulting in the death of part of a heart muscle.

Since it may be fatal in some instances, it is important to know the symptoms. In case of a heart attack, you might have:

- Pain or pressure in the chest
- Discomfort spreading to the back, jaw, throat, or arm
- Nausea, indigestion, or heartburn
- Weakness, anxiety, or shortness of breath
- Fast or irregular heartbeats

It is an emergency even when your symptoms are mild. So don't ignore or neglect symptoms like that since people may mix it with other symptoms.

HEALTH bulletin



Embryo study shows life's first steps

Scientists say a breakthrough in growing embryos will improve fertility treatments and revolutionise knowledge of the earliest steps to human life. For the first time, embryos have been grown past the point they would normally implant in the womb.

The research, in the UK and US, was halted just before the embryos reached the legal limit of 14-days old. But in an ethically-charged move, some scientists have already called for the 14-day limit to be changed.

The earliest steps towards human life are largely a mystery, but the research published in the journal Nature and Nature Cell Biology, has been able to study embryos for longer than ever before. About a week used to be the limit — with scientists able to grow a fertilised egg up to the stage it would normally implant into the womb.

But they have now found a way to chemically mimic the womb to allow an embryo to continue developing until the two week stage. It requires a combination of a nutrient-rich medium and a structure the embryo can pretend to "implant" upon. The experiments were deliberately ended at the 13-day stage - just before the legal limit, but far beyond anything that has been achieved before.

Uncovering health inequalities

STAR HEALTH DESK

Having a skilled health professional during childbirth can save the life of a woman and her child. But, in many parts of the world and within many countries, the presence of a health worker during childbirth is often a luxury. If a woman is poor, she is even more likely to deliver without support, putting herself and child at risk.

In Indonesia, this is a familiar story for poor women. Twenty years ago, only 1 in 5 women in the poorest 20% of the population gave birth with support from a skilled attendant.

Through recognising the inequalities and targeting programmes towards the poorest populations,

Indonesia has been able to improve the number of births attended by skilled personnel among the poorest population to 3 out of 5 births in the period 2007 to 2012. However, nearly all births among the richest 20% of the population were supported.

New WHO tool shows within-country inequalities across the globe

To help countries like Indonesia monitor health inequalities, WHO developed a new toolkit called the Health Equity Assessment Toolkit (HEAT). HEAT is a software package that utilises data from the WHO Health Equity Monitor and enables health professionals and researchers to explore the health inequalities in their countries. Additionally, users

can compare the state of inequality in their country with other countries.

Besides data on the proportion of births attended by skilled personnel, HEAT users can assess variations in coverage of immunisation, antenatal care, contraception, and breastfeeding, to name a few of the indicators covered.

In some countries, the gaps are more profound.

Equity in the global agenda Equity is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In pledging to achieve the SDGs, countries have committed to leave no one behind. SDG 3 focuses on ensuring healthy lives for all at all ages, positioning equity as a central issue in health, while SDG 10 calls for a reduction in inequality within and between countries to promote the inclusion and empowerment of all.

However, realising equity requires identifying where there are inequalities in the first place, and then monitoring the progress made at reducing them.

"Strong health information systems that collect, analyse and report disaggregated data covering all health areas are essential for achieving health equity," says Ahmad Reza Hosseinpoor, WHO Technical Officer in the Department of Information, Evidence and Research. "HEAT provides evidence on the state of health inequality and can help countries set priorities and establish equity-oriented policies, programmes and interventions."



PHOTO: WHO

5 health benefits of apple cider vinegar



While the uses for white vinegar are plentiful, apple cider vinegar has arguably even more applications. Its wide-ranging benefits include everything from curing hiccups to augment weight loss and some people have turned to apple cider vinegar to help with health concerns including diabetes, high cholesterol, and weight issues. Here are 5 health benefits of apple cider vinegar

- 1. Apple cider vinegar helps tummy trouble:** Sip some apple cider vinegar mixed with water. If a bacterial infection is at the root of your diarrhoea, apple cider vinegar could help contain the problem, thanks to its antibiotic properties.
- 2. Apple cider vinegar cures hiccups:** Take a teaspoonful of apple cider vinegar; its sour taste could stop a hiccup in its tracks.
- 3. Apple cider vinegar soothes a sore throat:** As soon as you feel the prickle of a sore throat, employ germ-busting apple cider vinegar to help head off the infection at the pass. Turns out, most germs can't survive in the acidic environment vinegar creates.
- 4. Apple cider vinegar could lower cholesterol:** A Japanese study found that half an ounce of apple cider vinegar a day lowered cholesterol in people who participated in the panel.
- 5. Apple cider vinegar aids in weight loss:** Apple cider vinegar can help you lose weight. The acetic acid suppresses your appetite, increases your metabolism, and reduces water retention.



This May is Mental Health Awareness Month

According to Mental Health America, more than 21 percent of adults between 18-64 will be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in a given year. That is more than 42.5 million people. Studies have shown that **1 in 4** people 18 and older lives with a mental disorder.

