



## FAQs on vaping

### What is a personal vaporiser (e-cigarette)?

Personal vaporisers are battery-powered devices that heat a liquid nicotine solution ('e-liquid') into an aerosol which is inhaled and exhaled as a visible mist (known as 'vaping'). Vaping delivers nicotine and replicates smoking behaviour, with the familiar hand-to-mouth action, 'throat hit' and the physical sensation of 'smoke' going into the lungs.

Vaporisers consist essentially of three components: a rechargeable battery, a tank, 'pod' or cartridge that holds the e-liquid and a coil (heating element).

### What is vaping for?

Vaping is mainly used as a short-term aid to quitting smoking, or as a long-term substitute for smoking by smokers who are otherwise unable or unwilling to quit smoking or nicotine on their own or with the available treatments. Switching to a less harmful alternative such as vaping (known as [tobacco harm reduction](#)) reduces the health risks without quitting the 'smoking' behaviour.



Pod model

Tank model

### Is it safer than smoking?

Vaping is not harmless, but there is overwhelming scientific agreement that it is far less harmful than smoking. The UK [Royal College of Physicians](#) and [Public Health England](#) concluded that the long-term health risk from vaping is unlikely to exceed 5% of the harm from smoking tobacco. This is not surprising as most of the [harm from smoking](#) is due to the tar, carbon monoxide and 7,000 other toxic chemicals produced by burning tobacco leaf. Vaporisers do not contain tobacco and there is no combustion or smoke.

Some potentially harmful toxins are present in vapour, but at [much lower levels](#) than in cigarette smoke and in most cases below the level known to cause harm. Furthermore, there is a substantial [reduction in toxins](#) measured in the blood and saliva of vapers compared to tobacco smokers. A recent study calculated that the overall [cancer risk](#) from long-term vaping is <1% of the risk from smoking.

Significant health improvement after switching from smoking to vaping include improved [asthma](#), [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease](#), [blood pressure](#), [cardiovascular health](#), [lung function](#) and reduced [pneumonia](#) risk.

The small health risks from vaping should be compared to the substantial risks from smoking. Up to [two out of three](#) long-term smokers will die prematurely from a smoking-related disease.

### What are the long-term risks?

Like all new products, the long-term health effects of vaping have yet to be established. However, based on current knowledge of the [ingredients](#) of vapour, the risk is certain to be much less than smoking. Studies of up to [four years](#) and ten years of real-world experience have not identified any significant risks to health.

### Is secondhand vapour harmful?

The risk to bystanders from 'passive vaping' appears to be [minimal](#). [Negligible](#) amounts of nicotine and other chemicals are released into the air when the vaper exhales, and this [dissipates quickly](#). Nevertheless, indoor vaping is best avoided around children, pregnant women and people with heart or lung disease.

### Is nicotine dangerous?

Although nicotine is the main addictive chemical in tobacco, it has [relatively minor](#) health effects, except in pregnancy and possibly in adolescence. The UK [Royal Society for Public Health](#) says it is 'no more harmful to health than caffeine'. It does not cause [cancer](#) or lung disease and plays only a minor role in [heart disease](#).

## Can vaping help you quit smoking?

There is growing scientific evidence that vaping helps some people quit smoking. Personal vaporisers are now the most popular quitting aid in many countries including the [United Kingdom](#) and the [United States](#).

[Modern devices](#) can provide the same levels of nicotine as tobacco cigarettes and can relieve urges to smoke and nicotine withdrawal symptoms such as irritability and loss of concentration. They also replicate the psychological and hand-to-mouth aspects of smoking.

Millions of smokers have reported quitting using a personal vaporiser in the [UK](#), [US](#) and [EU](#) - [over 6 million](#) people reported quitting smoking with a vaporiser in the EU alone in 2014. [Older devices](#) are at least as effective as the nicotine patch. [Newer devices](#) deliver nicotine more effectively and have higher quit rates.

Vaping is most effective when it is used [daily](#) and after allowing some time to find the [right device and e-liquid combination](#) that works best for the user.

## Is vaping legal in Australia?

It is legal to vape in Australia to quit smoking if you have a [prescription](#) from a registered Australian medical practitioner. Nicotine can be imported from overseas under the [TGA Personal Importation Scheme](#) or accessed legally from an accredited online Australian [compounding](#) pharmacy.

[State laws](#) regulate issues such as sale of nicotine, use in public places, age limits on sale, display and promotion of vaporisers. Regulations are different between jurisdictions and may change from time to time.

## How much does it cost?

Vaping is [substantially cheaper](#) than smoking. A simple starter kit can be purchased for as little as \$30. Depending on which products you buy and how heavily you vape, vaping is 80-90% less costly than smoking. Most smokers will save thousands of dollars each year by switching to vaping.

## Is vaping a gateway to smoking for young people?

Contrary to alarming claims, [regular vaping](#) by young people is rare and is almost exclusively confined to current or past smokers. Most teen vaping is experimental and short-lived. Teenagers are curious, vaping is seen as a fun thing to do and some kids try it. However, the great majority [do not use nicotine](#) and there is little or no evidence of [progression to smoking](#).

Overseas experience suggests that vaping is [replacing](#)—rather than encouraging—smoking of tobacco cigarettes among young people. Smoking rates in young people are continuing to fall in countries where vaporisers are readily available, in some cases such as the [US](#), more rapidly than ever before.

## Does vaping renormalise smoking?

There is [no evidence](#) that the increased visibility of vaping makes smoking appear more socially acceptable (renormalising smoking). In fact, in countries where vaporisers are freely available, smoking rates are continuing to fall, in some countries such as the [US](#), faster than ever. On the other hand, in Australia where vaping is restricted, smoking rates have [stagnated](#) over the 3-year period 2013-2016, for the first time ever.

Most vaping devices now look nothing like cigarettes and don't smell of smoke. Vaping [normalises 'not smoking'](#), and its visibility may encourage smokers to switch and quit smoking.

## What is ATHRA?

The Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association (ATHRA) is a not-for-profit health promotion organisation (awaiting charity status) established to improve public health by reducing the harm from tobacco smoking in Australia. ATHRA is managed by the Board of Directors, which consists of four independent medical practitioners and one consumer representative with an interest in public health. None of the directors have any financial or commercial relationship with any electronic cigarette or tobacco company.



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Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association is a registered health promotion charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. All donations over \$2 are tax deductible.  
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