



# E-Cigarettes: Harmful or Helpful?

## Debunking the myths and answering your questions

In recent months, while flipping through a magazine or watching television you may have noticed a surprising new product, electronic cigarettes (also known as e-cigarettes). You may notice that some of these products look like traditional cigarettes and are marketed similarly. But these products are not traditional tobacco products – they come in a variety of forms, like pens, e-hookah, e-cigars, and in a variety of flavors like chocolate chip or coffee. And unlike traditional tobacco products, electronic cigarettes are not well understood or regulated. You may even think they are safe, but the jury is still out. Below you will find information on the most frequently asked questions on e-cigarettes. The Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center hopes you will use this information to make an informed decision about the use of e-cigarettes.

**MYTH: The products and boxes don't contain any warnings like cigarettes or other tobacco products. They must be safe.**

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not regulate electronic nicotine delivery devices. This means tobacco companies and manufacturers are under no obligation to disclose a list of ingredients and amounts of these ingredients or notify the FDA when changes to the products occur. That means that the e-cigarette you buy today may be very different from the e-cigarette you buy tomorrow, even if it's the same brand. Some products contain nicotine, while others contain different chemicals, such as nitrosamine (a carcinogen found in tobacco) and diethylene glycol (a component of antifreeze). **MYTH: Electronic tobacco products are harmless and are safe to use.**

There is no evidence to show that any of the electronic products such as e-cigarettes, e-pipes, or e-cigars are a safe alternative to smoking. There appears to be harmful substances in the electronic products, and there are no known benefits associated from their use. We do not have any information on the health effects from long term use of these electronic products.

The negative effects that traditional cigarettes can have on your body are well studied and documented, but the impact of e-cigarettes on your overall health is not fully understood. A recent study revealed that the short-term effect of e-cigarettes (both nicotine and non-nicotine varieties) on lung function is the same as traditional cigarettes.<sup>1</sup> The products equally reduced the lung's ability to exhale nitric oxide, which can lead to respiratory illnesses such as asthma



and bronchitis. While further research is greatly needed, this indicates that e-cigarettes may cause immediate harm and negatively impact your ability to perform at your peak.

### **MYTH: E-cigarettes can be used to quit tobacco.**

E-cigarettes are not approved by the FDA as a cessation device. They have also not been tested as a cessation aid, and there is no evidence to support their use to help with quitting smoking. In fact, the opposite may be true. Experts are concerned that people who use e-cigarettes will get addicted to them and research shows that the use of e-cigarettes can lead to the use of traditional tobacco products.<sup>2</sup> There are many FDA approved medications to help you quit, such as nicotine replacement therapy, Zyban/Bupropion, or Chantix. Medications (over-the-counter and prescription) approved by the FDA have been tested for effectiveness and safety. There are also many proven counseling approaches that can be used in conjunction with medications to help you be more successful with your quit attempt. Please contact your Primary Care Provider or your Medical Treatment Facility (MTF) Health Promotion Program for cessation assistance.

### **MYTH: E-cigarettes can be used anywhere, including Navy workspaces.**

The current [SECNAVINST 5100.13E](#) Tobacco Policy states that all tobacco use is prohibited inside Department of the Navy facilities, including within Navy Medical and Dental Treatment facilities. All types of tobacco product use (smoking and smokeless) may only be used in the designated tobacco use area of your command or location. The bottom line is e-cigarettes cannot be used inside of any buildings. Some aircraft carriers have special designated areas for e-products separate from designated tobacco use areas. Many cities and states that have indoor air laws and smoking bans have prohibited e-product use, and some countries have even placed limitations on the importation of these products or had them banned altogether.

### **MYTH: If I make the choice to use e-cigarettes, I am only harming myself.**

Not only are you harming your body by inhaling the potentially harmful liquids found inside e-cigarettes, but having them available increases the risk of accidents involving the products. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported that the number of calls to poison centers regarding e-cigarette liquids rose from one per month in September 2010 to 215 per month in February 2014.<sup>3</sup> Over half of the calls involved young children under 5 years old, and about 42 percent of the calls involved people age 20 and older.<sup>3</sup> In addition, there have been numerous news stories about e-products starting fires while plugged into the wall or charger or that have exploded, causing injury to the user.



## Where can I get more information on e-cigarettes?

NMCPHC Tobacco Free Living Campaign

<http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/tobacco-free-living/Pages/tobacco-free-living.aspx>

NMCPHC - E-cigarettes: What We Don't Know Could Hurt You  
(insert link)

DoD Quit Tobacco Make Everyone Proud – Electronic Cigarettes

<http://www.ucanquit2.org/HowToQuit/ResourceLibrary/ElectronicCigarettes/GetPluggedIntoTheFacts.aspx>

DoD Quit Tobacco Make Everyone Proud – What's the Harm in Vapor?

<http://www.ucanquit2.org/HowToQuit/ResourceLibrary/ElectronicCigarettes/WhatsTheHarmInVapor.aspx>

Federal Drug Administration – E-Cigarettes: Questions and Answers

<http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm225210.htm>

Be Tobacco Free – Electronic Cigarettes

<http://betobaccofree.hhs.gov/about-tobacco/Electronic-Cigarettes/index.html>

## References

<sup>1</sup>Marini, S., et al., Short-term effects of electronic and tobacco cigarettes on exhaled nitric oxide. *Toxicol. Appl. Pharmacol.* April 13, 2014.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24732441>. Accessed October 27, 2014.

<sup>2</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Key Findings: Intentions to smoke cigarettes among never-smoking U.S. middle and high school electronic cigarette users, National Youth Tobacco Survey, 2011-2013. September 22, 2014. <http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/youth/e-cigarettes/>. Accessed October 28, 2014.

<sup>3</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. New CDC study finds dramatic increase in e-cigarette-related calls to poison centers. April 3, 2014.

<http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2014/p0403-e-cigarette-poison.html>. Accessed October 27, 2014.