

Do e-cigarettes help smokers quit?

More than 45 million Americans smoke cigarettes, the leading preventable cause of death in the U.S. Unfortunately, some stop-smoking methods, including nicotine gum and patches, are less effective than previously thought, according to a recent study in the journal *Tobacco Control*.

Enter battery-powered electronic cigarettes, which deliver vaporized nicotine without tobacco, tar, or other chemicals in regular cigarettes. (But nicotine itself has health risks of its own and is extremely addictive.) Their battery heats a cartridge of liquid nicotine solution, creating an aerosolized mist that the user puffs, or "vapes."

Though e-cigarettes emit no smoke, they deliver an experience like smoking, including the way they're held and the LED tip. Last year, 2.5 million Americans tried one. The cost: up to \$100 for a starter kit, which often includes the e-cig unit, two rechargeable lithium batteries, and five flavor cartridges. (Each cartridge equals roughly one pack of cigarettes.)

Fans and foes

Proponents of e-cigarettes say they're more healthful than the conventional type and that they might help smokers quit tobacco. Some research backs that up. In a study published last year in the *International Journal of Clinical Practice*, researchers interviewed more than

100 e-cigarette users and found that most were former smokers who had used the devices to help them quit. They'd tried to stop smoking previously an average of nine times, and two-thirds had tried a cessation drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration. A recent review of the available (albeit meager) scientific evidence on e-cigarettes in the *Journal of Public Health Policy* concluded that "electronic cigarettes show tremendous promise in the fight against tobacco-related morbidity and mortality."

Critics say that too little is known about the safety of e-cigarettes, which are unregulated. Some experts also worry that their availability

online—where a user need only click a box saying he or she is 18—could entice children and teens to try them. So could some of the flavors, such as piña colada and vanilla.

In 2010, the FDA tried to block the sale of some e-cigarette brands, arguing that they're marketed as smoking-cessation devices, which the agency regulates. A court disagreed. Now, some states (including Mississippi, New Jersey, and Utah) and cities have proposed or enacted bans on the sale or use of e-cigarettes.

Bottom line. Talk to your doctor before trying to quit smoking with e-cigarettes. Because they're not regulated, safety is a question and you use them at your own risk.

Anatomy of an e-cigarette

