

# Can electronic cigarettes help people to quit smoking?

This information sheet is looking at the evidence on whether or not electronic cigarettes (or e-cigarettes) work to help people to give up smoking. Some people believe that they are effective at helping people to reduce or quit smoking, and believe that they should be promoted for this. Other people see little evidence that e-cigarettes work for smoking cessation, and that e-cigarettes keep people addicted to nicotine and keep them smoking tobacco cigarettes.

This sheet also has information on smoking cessation approaches that we know work with most people who want to quit or reduce their smoking, and how these can be accessed in the ACT.

## Evidence about e-cigarettes and smoking cessation

There have been only a limited number of studies done to look at whether or not e-cigarettes work to help people stop (or reduce) smoking. This means that we have only a low level of evidence currently available. Nonetheless, studies show that:

- E-cigarettes (both nicotine and non-nicotine types) can reduce cravings and withdrawal symptoms.<sup>1</sup>
- E-cigarettes with nicotine help smokers to reduce the number of cigarettes they smoke, and can help them to stop smoking, more effectively than e-cigarettes that do not contain nicotine.<sup>2</sup>
- E-cigarettes are at least as effective as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) patches at helping people to quit smoking; however, people are more likely to continue using e-cigarettes than NRT.<sup>2</sup>
- Results for effectiveness vary by how much people use e-cigarettes (e.g. daily vs non-daily use), and what type of e-cigarette they use. Newer 'second-' and 'third-generation' e-cigarettes are more effective than the older 'cigalike' devices.<sup>3</sup>

- The effectiveness of e-cigarettes in helping people to quit smoking may be increased when combined with expert support.<sup>4</sup>

There is some evidence that there is a high 'dual' use of both e-cigarettes and tobacco cigarettes among adults in some countries. Studies show that people using e-cigarettes even while still smoking tobacco are more likely to try to quit, although it's not yet clear whether they will actually be successful at quitting.<sup>4,5</sup>

It is important to note that, although the evidence suggests that e-cigarettes could help some people to quit smoking, there have been relatively few studies done overall. The National Health and Medical Research Council position is that "there is currently insufficient evidence to conclude whether e-cigarettes can benefit smokers in quitting".<sup>6</sup>

The Therapeutic Goods Administration has not yet approved e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation aid, and it is illegal to market or sell e-cigarettes in Australia with the claim that they will help people who smoke to quit or cut down (see Information Sheet #4).

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Anyone thinking about using e-cigarettes to quit smoking should talk to a general practitioner or other health professional.

## What is known to help people to quit smoking?

Some people manage to quit smoking without any help from special supports or medications—they just go ‘cold turkey’. However, many people do need extra help to quit (or reduce) their smoking, and to stay quit.

There are two types of support that have been shown to be especially helpful for quitting (or reducing) smoking. These are:<sup>7</sup>

- Smoking cessation support from someone who is specially trained to help manage the habits and emotions linked to smoking. They provide structure, motivation, support and encouragement.<sup>8,9</sup>
- Nicotine replacement products or other quitting medications to reduce cravings and withdrawal symptoms.<sup>10</sup>

### Smoking cessation advice and support

In the ACT, smoking cessation advice and support is available from:

- Quitline (13 78 48), including a call-back service for on-going support
- Alcohol and Other Drug Workers in both government and non-government services
- Community Pharmacists
- General Practitioners, Nurses and other health professionals

Smoking cessation support might be just brief one-on-one advice, or might be through more intensive therapy. In some cases, health professionals may not be able to provide ongoing smoking cessation support directly, but they will be able to refer to someone who can.

### Nicotine replacement products and other quitting medications

Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) works by replacing some of the nicotine normally inhaled from cigarettes to help to stop, or reduce, cravings and the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal. There are different types of NRT—patches, gum, lozenges, spray, strips and inhalator.

All forms of NRT, when used correctly, have been shown to help people who are addicted to nicotine to quit smoking. The success of NRT at helping someone to quit or reduce smoking is improved when:

- Multi-session advice and support is provided by a health professional or trained smoking cessation support worker (see above).<sup>11</sup>
- A full course of 8–12 weeks worth of NRT is used.<sup>11</sup>
- Combination therapy, where you use a patch plus intermittent form of NRT (e.g. gum, strips, inhalator, lozenges, spray), has been shown to be more effective at suppressing cravings than just using NRT patches.<sup>11</sup>

All types of NRT can be bought over-the-counter at community pharmacies and other retailers such as supermarkets and convenience stores. Only nicotine patches can be bought at a subsidised rate with a prescription from a general practitioner (through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme). Intermittent types of NRT (e.g. gum, strips, inhalator, lozenges, spray) are not subsidised through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.<sup>12</sup>

There are also other smoking cessation medications that are available at a subsidised rate with a doctor's prescription—e.g. bupropion (Zyban) and varenicline (Champix).

### Other types of quitting methods

Other quitting methods do not have the same level of scientific evidence for being effective, but have helped some people who smoke to quit or reduce their smoking. This includes exercise, using online resources, hypnosis, acupuncture, and herbal preparations.<sup>13</sup>

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