

## Section 8.

# Nicotine and your mental health

### The connection between vaping and depression

Recent studies have found a link between vaping and mental health issues. In fact, regular nicotine use can worsen anxiety and stress, and leave you more susceptible to experiencing symptoms of depression.

Most people feel sad or depressed at times. It's a normal reaction to loss or life's challenges. But when intense sadness (like feeling helpless, hopeless, and worthless) lasts for many days to weeks and keeps you from enjoying your life, it may be something more than sadness.



People who vape are more likely to be diagnosed with depression compared with people who have never vaped. Plus, it certainly doesn't help that vapes and e-cigarettes contain toxic substances like arsenic, aluminum, and lead, which can negatively impact brain function, as well as overall health.

### Nicotine, stress and anxiety

Stress and anxiety can trigger cravings to vape or smoke, which makes it even harder for anyone trying to quit a bad habit. If you are hooked on nicotine, you might be tempted to reach for your vape, cigarettes or another substance, when you have these feelings, BUT they are not an effective way to cope. There are healthy and helpful ways to deal with stress and anxiety.

Stress is the uncomfortable feeling you get when you're worried, scared, angry, frustrated, or overwhelmed. It's caused by emotions, but it also affects your mood and body.

Stress is a normal part of life. Everyone experiences stress, and some stress is OK. It can get you ready for action and give you the motivation to get things done. For example, feeling stressed about an upcoming test can motivate you to study. But too much stress can make you feel overwhelmed, interfere with sleep, thinking and learning, and it can get in the way of enjoying life.

When you have too much stress for a long time, this can be bad for your physical and mental health. It can also lead to anxiety. Anxiety is feeling worried, nervous, or panicky. Anxiety can be a reaction to stress, or it can be triggered by other things in your life. It's normal to experience anxiety from time to time – but it can be a problem if it's a frequent part your daily life.



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If you have too much stress, you can have:

- tense muscles
- teeth grinding
- trouble sleeping
- lack of motivation
- headaches
- racing heart
- low energy or tiredness
- feeling overwhelmed
- tight jaw
- sweaty palms
- difficulty concentrating

Feeling anxious or irritable as you are quitting vaping or smoking is normal. But if you're feeling the anxiety is overwhelming, tell a close friend or family member, and talk to a healthcare professional.

### Causes of stress and anxiety

Stress comes from many different places.

From your parents: "Don't disappoint me, clean up, hurry up, finish this, do your homework, go out for the team, practice your music, try out for the school play, do your best, stay out of trouble, make more friends, don't ever try drugs."

From your friends: "How'd you do on the test, try this, prove you're not a loser, don't hang out with them, don't wear that."

Even from yourself: "I need to lose weight, build more muscle, wear the right clothes, get better grades, score more goals, show my parents I'm not a kid." Other causes of stress may be:

- listening to parents argue
- thinking about the future, like going to university, or getting a job
- worrying about how your body's changing
- lack of sleep
- figuring out how to be independent
- being pressured to do something you know is bad for you, like vaping
- dealing with romantic relationships
- feeling guilty
- feeling pressure to get good grades
- not being good enough at sports or other activities
- worrying about world problems

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### How do people deal with stress?

Nobody can avoid all stress, but you can learn ways to deal with it. When you're stressed, it is normal to want to feel better. Anything that makes you feel better is called a coping strategy.

Negative strategies can be quick fixes, but they're harmful because they can be dangerous and make stress worse in the long run. Think about some of the ways people cope with stress that can really hurt them.

Some examples of negative coping strategies include:

- Vaping
- Drugs
- Cigarettes
- Alcohol
- Bullying
- Fighting
- Skipping school
- Running away
- Isolating themselves or withdrawing

### Dealing with stress

These harmful choices may help you feel good for a little while, but some can be really dangerous. They also end up making people worried about you or angry with you - and you can become a lot more stressed in the long run. They are especially worrisome if they are a major way you deal with stress because you may turn to these behaviours more often during hard times.

This is one of the ways substance use starts. If you are doing some of these things, ask yourself, "Why?". If it is to deal with problems, consider other ways of dealing with the same problems. There are many healthy ways of coping. Healthy coping strategies are safe and can help you feel better without causing disruptions in your life.

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### 10 tips for managing stress and anxiety

Skills to “de-stress” and calm yourself work best when they’re practiced ahead of time, not just when the pressure’s on. Some may work better than others, it’s about finding the ones that work for you so you won’t think about reaching for a vape, smoke or other substance to manage.

These tips are good stress relievers for anyone, not just for people trying to quit vaping or smoking!

#### 1. Stop and breathe.

Conscious breathing is the body’s natural antidote to stress. Pause what you’re doing, and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Concentrate on the inhale and the exhale of your breath; it will help you calm down and think clearly.

#### 2. Avoid over-scheduling.

If you’re feeling stretched, consider cutting out an activity or two, choosing just the ones that are most important to you.

#### 3. Move your body.



Any form of exercise, from hitting the gym to yoga, can act as a stress reliever. When you exercise, your brain releases chemicals that make you feel good. Just walking 20 minutes a day or taking a few minutes to do a stretching routine can help!

#### 4. Be present.

Life can be overwhelming, especially when you get caught up in worrying about what’s next. Instead, focus on what you can control in the present moment and try to stay in the moment.

#### 5. Eat and drink well.



Good nutrition makes you healthier, keeps you alert through the day and keeps your mood steady. When you’re stressed out, it’s easy to eat on the run or eat junk food. Eating healthy and drinking lots of water will cut down the toxic effects of stress. Keep healthy snacks like fruit, trail mix and yogurt nearby, and don’t skip meals.

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### 6. Decaffeinate.



Caffeine can help you stay awake, but it also makes your body feel more tense, jittery and stressed. That's not helpful when you're quitting vaping. Cutting back on or gradually eliminating caffeinated products—like coffee, energy drinks, and soda—while you are quitting will lessen your feelings of stress and anxiety.

### 7. Get a good night's sleep.



If you get less than 8 hours of sleep, your body won't tolerate stress as well as it could. Go to sleep about the same time every night. Take power naps when you need them. When you get into bed, don't do homework, read, or use the phone, and don't solve your problems in bed. When you think about all the things that bother you, you have trouble falling asleep and wake up in the middle of the night to worry more. Give yourself plenty of time to think things through, make a list if you need to, and then set it aside! You can also try visualization before bed to relieve stress.

### 8. Reach out.

Share what you're going through with people who make you feel good about yourself and want to help you stay nicotine-free. Talk to your friends, family, teachers, school counsellors, and other important people in your life who support you and your decision to stop vaping/smoking.

### 9. Let some things go.

It's important to try to fix problems, but sometimes there's nothing you can do to change a problem, so don't waste your energy worrying about it. If you use your energy worrying about things you cannot change, you won't have enough left over to fix the things you can.

### 10. Make time for fun.



Build time into your schedule for activities you enjoy — read a good book, play with your pet, do a hobby, make art or music, spend time with positive people, or be in nature.