

Why do college-aged young adults use e-cigarettes?

12 January 2016, by David J. Hill



Numerous studies have examined the reasons adults use e-cigarettes. But what drives another important group—college-aged young adults—to use them? Turns out, like most things they are known to try, it's for enjoyment.

That's according to a University at Buffalo study, the results of which were published online in December in the journal *Addictive Behaviors*.

Researchers from UB's School of Public Health and Health Professions surveyed more than 1,400 [college students](#) from four upstate New York universities. Of that sample, 429 students (nearly 30 percent) had ever tried [e-cigarettes](#); of these, nearly 72 percent reported using e-cigarettes to "try something new," and nearly 58 percent reported using them for enjoyment.

"Our findings suggest that college students and young adults may be more interested in using e-cigarettes for affective reasons, such as enjoyment or the pleasure they get from using these products, compared with use for cognitive reasons such as quitting smoking or because they perceive e-cigarettes to be a safer alternative to cigarette

smoking," said Megan Saddleson, PhD, who led the study while completing her doctorate in community health and health behavior at UB. Saddleson is now a postdoctoral fellow with the Tobacco Centers of Regulatory Science (TCORS) at the University of Pennsylvania.

The overall sample size included 1,437 students. However, for this study, Saddleson and her team were interested in students who had tried e-cigarettes at some point, leading to the sample size of 429 students. A small number, 15 students, reported vaping daily. All daily vapers said they use e-cigarettes because they enjoy the product.

"The availability of flavors could be related to the enjoyment factor of e-cigarettes, especially among young people," Saddleson explained.

In addition, 77 percent of the survey participants who had vaped within the past month reported using e-cigarettes because they are less toxic than [tobacco cigarettes](#). "Using e-cigs because they are less toxic could appeal to users and make the product more enjoyable for the user," Saddleson said.

A number of studies have focused on e-cigarette use among adults; researchers are now also studying younger age groups, particularly college-aged [students](#), who are known to be drawn to novel products.

"It's important to research the practical reasons for e-cigarette use, such as quitting smoking, but we should also be cognizant that there are often feelings and emotions associated with certain behaviors," said Saddleson.

"The popularity of e-cigarettes is likely to be greatly influenced by enjoyment or the satisfaction that comes with using e-cigarettes, which could also be related to their addictive potential," she adds.

While Saddleson's study did not investigate whether e-cigarettes are a "gateway" product to tobacco cigarettes, studies indicate that that's not the case. "National trends in e-cigarette use and cigarette use do not suggest that gateway is an issue," she said. "Smoking continues to decline as e-cigarette use has risen."

More information: M.L. Saddleson et al. Enjoyment and other reasons for electronic cigarette use: Results from college students in New York, *Addictive Behaviors* (2016). DOI: [10.1016/j.addbeh.2015.11.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2015.11.012)

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