



## RESEARCH NEWS

# E-cigarettes help smokers quit, Cochrane review confirms

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Electronic cigarettes may help smokers quit, and no serious side effects are associated with their use, a review of the latest evidence has found.<sup>1</sup>

An updated Cochrane review found no new randomised controlled trials of e-cigarettes since its first review, published in December 2014.<sup>2</sup> However, the updated review includes 11 observational studies, and those that measured side effects found no serious side effects from using e-cigarettes for as long as two years. Throat and mouth irritations were the most commonly reported side effects in the short to medium term.

The original review included two randomised controlled trials involving more than 600 participants and found that e-cigarettes containing nicotine may increase the chances of stopping smoking within six to 12 months, compared with using an e-cigarette without nicotine. The researchers were unable to determine whether e-cigarettes were more effective than a nicotine patch in helping smokers to quit, as not enough people took part in the study.

Jamie Hartmann-Boyce, of the Cochrane Tobacco Addiction Group and lead author of the latest Cochrane review, said that more in-depth research was needed on the effectiveness of e-cigarettes.

“The randomised evidence on smoking cessation is unchanged since the last version of the review,” she said. “We are encouraged to find many studies are now under way, particularly as electronic cigarettes are an evolving technology.”

An observational study in *The BMJ* this week shows that the growth in use of e-cigarettes has been associated with a higher rate of successful attempts to quit smoking.<sup>3</sup>

Ann McNeill, professor of tobacco addiction at King’s College, London, said that smokers struggling to quit should try all possible methods, including e-cigarettes.

“We increasingly know or hear of people who say that electronic cigarettes helped them to stop smoking,” she said. “These two new publications, using very different designs, provide objective evidence for this.

“The *BMJ* study found that successful quit attempts increased over the period of time that electronic cigarettes became popular. The Cochrane study included an analysis of two of the most robustly designed studies and found that electronic cigarettes with nicotine helped smokers to stop.”



[Image: Rich Pedroncelli/PA]

- 1 McRobbie H, Bullen C, Hartmann-Boyce J, Hajek P. Electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation and reduction. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 2014;9:CD010216. doi:10.1002/14651858.CD010216.pub3. pmid:25515689.
- 2 McRobbie H, Bullen C, Hartmann-Boyce J, Hajek P. Electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation and reduction. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 2014;12:CD010216. doi:10.1002/14651858.CD010216.pub2. pmid:25515689.
- 3 Beard E, West R, Michie S. Association between electronic cigarette use and changes in quit attempts, success of quit attempts, use of smoking cessation pharmacotherapy, and use of stop smoking services in England: time series analysis of population trends. *BMJ* 2016;354:i4645.

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