



# AT WHAT COST?

## VAPING AND MENTAL HEALTH

### YOUNG PEOPLE ARE FACING TWO RELATED CRISES

The 2022 National Youth Tobacco Survey shows that about 1 in 10 middle and high school students use e-cigarettes, and more than 1 in 4 who use e-cigarettes vape daily.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, symptoms of anxiety and depression in young people have doubled from pre-pandemic levels.<sup>2</sup>

These two crises are not isolated. Though more research is needed about the connections between vaping nicotine and mental health, numerous studies expose the worrying connections between them.

### THE "STRESS RELIEF" ILLUSION

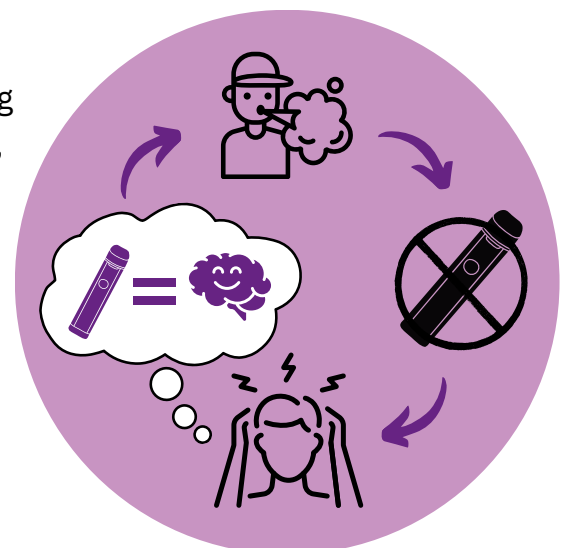
Many young people start and continue to vape because they think vaping will relieve their mental health symptoms. The most common reason youth give for continuing to use e-cigarettes after their first use is "I am feeling anxious, stressed, or depressed."<sup>3</sup> The illusion that vaping improves mental health was created by the tobacco industry and pushed through marketing, preying on those looking for relief.

**81%**

of young people ages 15-24 who had used e-cigarettes said they started vaping to decrease stress, anxiety or depression.<sup>2</sup>

### THE NICOTINE WITHDRAWAL CYCLE

Part of the illusion comes down to biology. When someone hasn't vaped in a while, it doesn't take long for symptoms of nicotine withdrawal like irritability, anxiety, depression and insomnia to begin. Vaping gives the illusion of relief from these symptoms, because consuming nicotine stops feelings of withdrawal. The cycle of symptoms followed by relief can create the false perception that vaping benefits mental health overall, even though it only curbs temporary withdrawal symptoms.<sup>2</sup> It is a difficult cycle to break and Big Tobacco knows it.



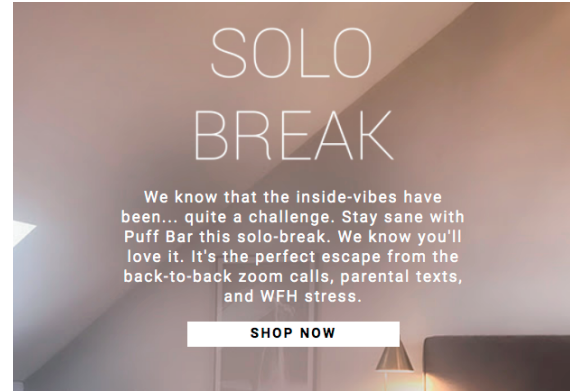


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## BIG TOBACCO LINKS VAPING & MENTAL HEALTH

The tobacco industry's marketing campaigns try to link e-cigarette use to relaxation, pleasure and stress relief. Below are some of the ad slogans and flavors that the tobacco industry uses to convince customers of this connection:

- "Stay sane"
- "Perfect escape"
- "Relaxed and enjoyable"
- Bliss
- Soothe
- Chillax
- Zen



*A Puff Bar ad connects vaping to stress relief*

This marketing strategy, combined with the experience of the nicotine withdrawal cycle, seems to reinforce the connection between vaping and coping with poor mental health for those that vape. This thinking adds to the stress relief illusion. 45% of those who vape frequently agree it is OK to vape to relieve stress, while only 20% of non-vapers agree.<sup>2</sup>

## THE REAL COST OF VAPING, POOR MENTAL HEALTH

Young people who vape frequently are

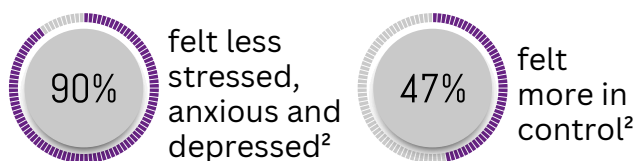
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more likely to be diagnosed with depression than their non-vaping peers.<sup>2</sup>

- Young people who vape report more days of poor mental health than those who don't.<sup>2</sup>
- Vaping nicotine can make existing mental health conditions worse.<sup>4</sup>
- Using e-cigarettes is associated with difficulty concentrating, remembering and making decisions.<sup>2</sup>

## QUITTING IS THE BEST STRESS RELIEVER

Of young people who quit vaping...



Quitting vaping can relieve mental health symptoms and improve quality of life. Visit [www.flavorshookkidsmn.org](http://www.flavorshookkidsmn.org) to learn more about tobacco industry targeting and how to take action.

References available at [www.ansrmn.org/issues-resources/e-cigarettes](http://www.ansrmn.org/issues-resources/e-cigarettes).

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## **“At What Cost? Vaping and Mental Health” Factsheet Citations**

1. Cooper, M. et al. (2022, October 7). Notes from the field: E-cigarette use among middle and high school students - United States, 2022. *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7140a3>
2. Truth Initiative. (2021). Colliding crises: Youth Mental Health and Nicotine Use. <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/emerging-tobacco-products/colliding-crisis-youth-mental-health-and-nicotine-use>
3. Gentzke, A. et al. (2022, March 11). Tobacco Product Use and Associated Factors Among Middle and High School Students — National Youth Tobacco Survey, United States, 2021. *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss7105a1>
4. Allina Health. (2022). *How Tobacco and Vaping Affect Youth and Young Adults* [fact sheet]. <https://account.allinahealth.org/library/download?documentuid=db9214ad-1b23-487c-8aa5-992f957e1216>