

Understanding Vaping: Why Teens Turn to Vaping for Stress and Anxiety Relief

May 21

Reprinted with permission from MANTRAInc [Understanding Vaping: Why Teens Turn to Vaping for Stress and Anxiety Relief](#)



About the Author

Harper Johnson is a fourth-year nursing student at the University of Manitoba and a recent participant in MANTRA's community practicum placement program.

In today's fast-paced world, many adolescents and young adults deal with stressors ranging from academic pressures to social expectations.

Amidst these challenges, vaping has emerged as a seemingly convenient coping mechanism and youth are often not aware of the harmful effects. However, the allure of instant relief creates a haze covering the deeper complexities at play.

While initially perceived as a stress reliever, vaping often exacerbates the very anxieties it provides brief relief to. Understanding the interplay between stress,

social dynamics, and mental health is essential in addressing the rising trend of vaping among youth.

Perceived Stress Relief

Many teens and young adults view vaping as a quick and accessible way to cope with their stress. Unfortunately, this perceived stress relief is often temporary and does not address the underlying causes of stress like school, social dynamics, and home life. This creates a cycle of use which can worsen the feelings of stress.

While nicotine may provide a short-term sense of relief, it can also lead to an [increased stress response in the long run](#).

Nicotine activates the release of the stress hormone, cortisol, which can contribute to worsened feelings of anxiety. It also influences neurotransmitters in the brain such as dopamine and serotonin. Initially, nicotine increases these neurotransmitters, creating a temporary mood lift. Since these effects only last about 30 minutes, people feel the need to keep vaping throughout the day to keep up the feeling of relief. However, over time, the brain may adapt to nicotine use, and the natural balance of neurotransmitters can be disrupted which leads to further mood instability.

Social Norms

Social dynamics play a significant role in the decision to vape among young people. Peer pressure, the desire to fit in, and the influence of social circles can lead individuals to adopt vaping as a way to connect with others or as a response to societal expectations. The normalization of vaping in certain social groups may contribute to its appeal as a coping mechanism.

Limited Understanding of Risk

Some young people may turn to vaping without a full understanding of its potential risks and consequences. The misconception that vaping is a harmless alternative to traditional smoking can lead individuals to start vaping without recognizing the potentially negative impact on mental health.

Self-Medication

Individuals dealing with mental health issues may turn to vaping as a form of self-medication. The nicotine present in many vaping products can temporarily alleviate

symptoms of anxiety or depression, creating a dependency that reinforces the habit as a coping mechanism. However, this self-medication approach often [masks the root causes of mental health challenges](#) and delays in seeking professional help.

It is crucial to address the root causes of stress and mental health issues among young people and provide alternative coping strategies that promote long-term well-being. Additionally, fostering open conversations about mental health within communities can contribute to reducing the stigma associated with seeking professional help.

Coping with stress and anxiety is a crucial aspect of maintaining mental well-being. Instead of turning to harmful habits like vaping, there are safe and healthy habits to try instead.

- **Mindfulness and Meditation:** Mindfulness practices and meditation can help to stay present and reduce stress. [Techniques like deep breathing, guided meditation, and mindfulness](#) exercises can help to identify what is stressing you out and the triggers of anxiety and think about solutions to the problems.
- **Regular Exercise:** Physical activity has many benefits for mental health. Regular exercise releases endorphins, the happy hormone! It also helps reduce stress and anxiety hormones. Activities like walking, jogging, yoga, or any form of exercise that you enjoy can contribute to a healthier mindset.
- **Social Support:** Building and maintaining strong social connections can provide a valuable support system. Talking to friends, family, or a mental health professional about stressors and anxieties can offer different perspectives and emotional support. This can also be helpful when quitting or starting the quitting journey as strong social supports are crucial during this time.
- **Hobbies and Recreation:** Engaging in activities that bring joy and relaxation can be beneficial in relieving stress. Whether reading, painting, playing music, or spending time in nature, having hobbies provides a positive outlet for emotional expression.
- **Cognitive-behavioural Techniques:** Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques can be applied to challenge and change negative thought patterns. [Identifying and modifying irrational beliefs](#) can significantly impact the way stress and anxiety are perceived.
- **Limiting Stimulants:** Reducing or eliminating the consumption of stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine can contribute to a more stable mood. These

substances can make the feelings of stress and anxiety worse so it might be time to try decaf!

- **Professional Support:** Seeking help from mental health professionals, such as therapists or counsellors, can provide tailored strategies for managing stress and anxiety. Professional support offers a safe and confidential space to explore and address the root causes of emotional challenges. There are also many resources and helplines for support while quitting nicotine that can be very helpful in reducing the stress surrounding this.

What Now?

Navigating the rugged landscape of adolescence and young adulthood requires unique and specific approaches to promoting mental well-being. Rather than seeking relief from stressors in potentially harmful habits like vaping, cultivating healthy coping mechanisms is crucial in this social environment.

From mindfulness practices to seeking professional support, a multifaceted approach empowers young people to address stressors head-on and foster resilience. By facilitating open dialogues and promoting alternative coping strategies, we can steer young generations towards pathways of holistic well-being, ensuring that stress doesn't dictate their journey.

If you need immediate help, the following numbers can be called at any time to seek the help you need:

Smokers Helpline

1-877-513-5333.

Talk Tobacco: Indigenous Quit Smoking and Vaping Support

1-833-998-8255 (TALK)

Klinik Crisis Line

204-786-8686
or 1-888-322-3019
TTY 204-784-4097

Kids Help Phone

1-800-668-6868

Text CONNECT to 686868

Resources

<https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/quitting-smoking-vaping/concerns-about-health-and-mental-health-increasingly>

<https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/targeted-communities/3-ways-vaping-affects-mental-health>

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/anxiety-bc-coping-strategies-v3-6.pdf>

<https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19/coping-with-stress-and-anxiety>

<https://www.gov.mb.ca/mhcw/index.html>