

## Marijuana: Certain methods of smoking healthier than others? <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

As the "Technology" of smoking weed advances, my friends say that different ways are healthier than others... I know that either way it is still not healthy, but there is a new product called a vaporizer and they say that it burns a certain way to where the weed is not as harmful as smoking it from a pipe, bong, blunt, or joint. Is this true? How exactly does the vaporizer work?

### **Answer**

Dear Reader,

It's time to hash out the differences in technologies used to smoke marijuana (cannabis, pot, weed). The short answer to your question is that it's uncertain if vaporizers definitively create a high with overall fewer health risks, as research on marijuana is limited due to its classification as a Schedule I drug <sup>[2]</sup>. Many people argue that "vaping" poses fewer health risks than other modes of ingestion since it doesn't combust the marijuana and produce carcinogens. However, e-cigarettes, which is a common method of vaping marijuana products, have been associated with severe lung disease <sup>[3]</sup> and has even been fatal. In many of these cases, the patients were using THC products. Furthermore, it's worth noting that while it can be easy to buy a vaporizer, marijuana itself isn't legal federally and in many states in the United States — so if you're caught with it, you may face consequences (sometimes at the hand of law enforcement). That said, vaporizing still has its fair share of highs and lows regarding its potential health impacts (more on those in a bit).

When discussing vaporizers, it's good to know that different varieties of marijuana (e.g., oil, wax, or liquid) may necessitate different vaporizer devices. Generally, marijuana vaporizers work by heating the cannabis to temperatures right below its temperature of combustion (roughly 175 to 225 degrees Celsius), thereby evaporating tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) into a thin mist. The higher the temperature, the more vapor is produced and the stronger the effects on the smoker. Depending on the design of the vaporizer, the vapor is then captured in a glass and inhaled via a tube. Research indicates that this process reduces the number of toxins produced through combustion, providing arguments that vaporizing is a lower risk way to smoke weed as compared

to pipes, bongs, blunts, or joints. However, vaporizing still produces carbon monoxide, which can cause users to experience headaches, nausea, and dizziness — though the general amount is significantly lower than with smoking tobacco. Furthermore, while vaporizers are readily available on the Internet, they tend to be poorly regulated and lack quality control and assessments, which may affect how the marijuana is heated and the highs people experience.

Along with vaporizers specifically made for marijuana, the emergence of electronic cigarettes (e-cigs) [4] has allowed for another method of inhaling cannabinoids like THC. Several types of e-cigs have also been adapted to be able to vape cannabis-based liquids, dry herbs, and oil concentrates. Yet, many of these oil concentrates and liquids, similar to many vaporizers, aren't properly regulated on the market. However, vaping, particularly THC products, has been associated with severe lung disease. This can be fatal, and due to the severity, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that people not use e-cigarettes for any purpose.

No matter how you smoke it, using substances such as marijuana aren't without some potential risk. However, similar to tobacco, marijuana can have negative health effects, even when smoked, vaped, or eaten [5] in moderation. For more information on the intricacies of consuming marijuana, check out the Marijuana, Hash, & Other Cannabis [6] category in the *Go Ask Alice!* Alcohol and Other Drugs [7] archive.

Here's to hoping that there is soon more research on this technology!

Alice!

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