

# Nicotine Use & First-Episode Psychosis

If you smoke or vape, you're far from alone — nicotine use is very common among people going through psychosis. This sheet explains why, what it means for your treatment, and what might help.

*"Using nicotine when things feel hard is understandable. But it affects your body and your medication in ways that are worth knowing about — and there is real support available if you want to make a change."*

## SOMETHING TO KNOW

**Nicotine use is more common in people with psychosis** than in the general population — and there are real reasons for this that aren't about weakness or bad choices.

## WHY IT MATTERS

**Smoking can affect how your medication works** in your body — something your care team needs to know about to get your treatment right.

## THE GOOD NEWS

**Quitting or cutting down is possible** with the right support — and it does not make psychosis symptoms worse. In fact, it often helps.

## WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING

### 1 Nicotine use is common in early psychosis.

Rates of smoking and vaping are significantly higher in young people with psychosis than in the general population — there are biological and psychological reasons behind this, not just habit.

**2 Many people use nicotine to cope.** Nicotine can temporarily ease some of the harder parts of psychosis — like low mood, restlessness, or medication side effects. This is understandable, even though it creates its own problems over time.

**3 Smoking may affect how your medication works.** Chemicals in cigarettes may cause your body to process some antipsychotics faster, which can mean lower drug levels. Your prescriber needs to know if you smoke.

**4 Vaping carries similar risks.** E-cigarettes are not a safe alternative for people with psychosis. High-dose vaping has been linked to increased risk of psychotic episodes, and nicotine affects the brain's dopamine system regardless of how it's delivered.

## WHAT MIGHT HELP

### TELL YOUR CARE TEAM IF YOU SMOKE OR VAPE

This isn't about being judged — it directly affects your medication. Your team may need to adjust your dose based on your nicotine use and can support you if you want to cut down.

### YOU DON'T HAVE TO QUIT ALL AT ONCE

Cutting down gradually is a valid approach. Nicotine replacement therapy — patches, gum, lozenges — can help manage cravings without the harms of smoking and won't affect your medication in the same way.

### QUITTING WON'T MAKE SYMPTOMS WORSE

A common worry is that stopping will make psychosis worse. Research suggests this isn't the case — many people find their mood and symptoms improve when they reduce nicotine.

### ASK ABOUT SPECIALIST SUPPORT

Stopping when you have psychosis is harder than average — that's a fact, not an excuse. Ask your team about programs designed specifically for people with mental health conditions.

### This isn't about willpower

Nicotine use in psychosis often makes sense in the short term. Understanding why you use it is a better starting point than blame.

### You deserve proper support

People with psychosis find quitting harder than most — not because of lack of effort, but because of how nicotine interacts with the brain during this time.

### Taking clozapine or olanzapine?

These medications are particularly affected by smoking. If you change how much you smoke, let your prescriber know right away — your dose may need adjusting.