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Health aspects of e-cigarettes - Short Information for physicians

The hazardous health effects of smoking are a consequence of the inhalation of toxic combustion products contained in tobacco smoke. For centuries mankind has known about the harmfulness of smoke, that's why - among other things - chimneys were invented. Nicotine contributes to the tobacco dependence of smokers, but it has - similar to caffeine - only moderate effects on the cardiovascular system evident as slight and transient increases of heart rate and blood pressure. As early as in 1976 the late Michael Russell has emphasized this, stating "People smoke for the nicotine but they die from the tar".

Since 2006 devices known as e-cigarettes have been on the market, which vaporize flavoured nicotine solutions and thus enable smokers inhaling nicotine without harmful combustion products. Unlike tobacco smoke with around 4,000 toxic and partially carcinogenic substances, the mist (also called 'vapor') generated by e-cigarettes contains only propylene glycol, glycerol, and tiny amounts of volatile food flavorings. Published studies show that the plasma levels of toxic substances in smokers substantially decrease after the switch to e-cigarettes, being identical to the levels of non-smokers after a few weeks. Thus, from a medical point of view, individuals who switched from smoking to the consumption of e-cigarettes have to be classified as non-smokers.

For further information as well as references to published studies I will gladly be available by phone or mail for interested physicians and other individuals working in the health sector.


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