

When I was younger, I always thought that cigarettes and nicotine were gross, and a clear waste of money. However, shortly after starting my sophomore year in high school, I started dating someone that smoked cigarettes. I still thought that they were a waste of money and gross, and never got into smoking cigarettes myself at this point. Instead, I had my introduction into tobacco use from smoking it in combination with marijuana. When I used tobacco, it was relatively infrequent, and I don't recall ever craving it at this point.

About a year later, following infrequent tobacco usage, a good portion of my friends started using nicotine vapes. When I would spend time with them, we would all use them together, and eventually I got my own. Originally, we were using the comparatively low nicotine concentration vape juice with OHM vapes. I used these vapes for months. I would use them on my way to school, during breaks in school, all night long in my bedroom, and I could easily hide it.

Eventually, my friend group started shifting away from using the bulky, low nicotine vapes, to using Juuls. I would use them when they were around, and enjoyed them, but held out on buying one. I knew doing would be a big step in the wrong direction for my nicotine usage/ addiction. Eventually though, I caved, and I bought a Juul; this was more than tripling the amount of nicotine that my current vape contained.

Following this, I have been using high nicotine vapes (salt vapes, with a nicotine concentration of 5% or more) on and off for the last 4 years. Within these four years there have been multiple quit attempts. During a few of these I have tried to exchange vaping for cigarettes, as they are less convenient to use (I can't smoke them inside or in the bathroom at school), and cheaper. I have also tried cold-turkey quitting, and using nicotine gum.

All of these attempts so far have been failures, and I think a large part of this is due to the fact that so many people that I know are using high nicotine concentration devices. For these last 4 years, my partners, roommates, friends, and most recently my little sibling (who started using when they were 15), are all as equally as wrapped in nicotine addiction as I am. I feel like I can't quit, as I am constantly surrounded by vapes. I was so easy and accessible to start using, and they have stayed as accessible the entirety of me using them.

The newest challenge to my attempts at quitting have been disposable vapes. Currently in Vermont, there are vapes being sold under the brand name, Loon, that have juice with a nicotine concentration of 6.5%. These disposables and many others like them have this extraordinarily high nicotine concentration (25% higher than Juuls) and they have almost completely replaced other devices. I try to not buy them myself, but they are constantly around me. I feel like my nicotine addiction is equally as bad, or even worse than ever.

I never thought that I would end up addicted to nicotine, and now it's just another part of life. If cigarettes were my only option, I don't think that I would be facing these same issues. My personal experience is not unique. So many other people that I know got hooked in their mid-teens, and are still using or attempting to quit today.