

life stuff

Why So Many Women Are Still Vaping in Secret

That watermelon-mint scent in the air? Don't know where it's coming from. Certainly not me!

BY JILLIAN ANTHONY
PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY
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FROM LEFT: POLINA/REXEL; GETTY IMAGES

In the winter of 2021, I was 32, unemployed, and living with my parents in Las Vegas, where I knew no one. And as this unfortunate COVID-era situation dragged on, my mood grew darker. As a treat, I bought a vape at a local shop. I'd only occasionally smoked before, but now I desperately needed an escape.

I'd close my eyes and inhale, getting a rush of pleasure and a fleeting reprieve from my grim reality. Vaping became my way of holding off an emotional tsunami with a boogie board. So I kept buying \$12 electronic tubes of watermelon-mint-flavored nicotine to suck down in my bedroom, away from my parents' prying eyes and aging lungs. Sometimes they'd knock on my door and I'd yell "One second!" while flapping my hands in the air. I was a millennial who'd developed a habit that felt markedly teenaged. And it had me in a choke hold.

For the uninitiated, vapes, or e-cigarettes, work by electronically heating a liquid solution, usually containing nicotine, into vapor. That makes its way through your lungs and into your bloodstream, prompting your body to release adrenaline. And because vapes can have higher nicotine concentrations than cigarettes do—one Juul pod, which seasoned vapers can puff through in a day, contains roughly the same amount as 20 cigs—that's a *lot* of adrenaline. It's also worth noting that some brands sell even stronger pods.

Which is probably why e-cigs have surged in popularity as traditional cigarette use continues to plummet. And although vaping is often associated with high schoolers sneaking hits in the hallway, young adults are the ones propelling the rise: Nearly one-fifth of 18- to 29-year-olds reported vaping in a 2022 survey, the highest of all age groups.

Most vapers, including me, are well aware of the health risks. "You're probably just melting plastic, then basically pouring it into your brain," says Claire, 43, from Evanston, Illinois. (Maybe not exactly, but despite its "healthier" aura—courtesy of some wishful thinking—inhaling nicotine vapor has been linked to an increased risk of asthma, pulmonary disease, and cardiac problems. Even THC options have been associated with respiratory issues.) It's just that facing the world head-on sometimes seems like an impossible alternative. "I'm not proud, but I haven't cut it out yet," Claire says of her vaping via a \$70 rose-gold Beboe pen. "I did stop drinking. So it's like, I took care of that and I'm gonna need a little while."

"It's not the best for you," echoes Davida, 27, from Chicago. "But the same can be said for drinking alcohol or soda." She started at 19 to wean off cigarettes. Eight years later, she's still at it. "I'm older than a lot of the people who are Juuling now," she notes. "I'm afraid I look like I'm trying to be younger than I am." That's why she stays away from Juuls, preferring to inhale her brother's homemade "juice" from a rechargeable box mod. It makes her look

It was like holding off an emotional tsunami with a boogie board.

Who's Actually Doing It
Like I said, a lot of us.

▼

19%
of 18- to 29-year-olds are vaping. That's more than any other adult age group.

35%
to **12%**
is the drop in cigarette use among the same age group in the past 20 years.

14%
of U.S. high school students and

3%
of middle schoolers reported nicotine vaping in 2022.

SOURCES: 2022 GALLUP AND CDC/FDA SURVEYS

more sophisticated than a 10th grader, she says, and she knows precisely what's inside. Still... "it's dorky," she adds. "Nobody looks cool vaping."

Nobody has an easy time quitting either. Vapes can be just as viciously addictive as cigarettes (see: that avalanche of nicotine), something Jasmine, 24, who lives in Brooklyn, knows well. She started on e-cigs during the pandemic just like I did. "Everyone was bored," she remembers. "Everything was bleak. Everyone needed an outlet." At first, she liked the way it made her feel and how it got her past writer's block. The illicitness was also part of the appeal. "I like to keep secrets," she says. But soon, she was sneaking constant hits inside the preschool where she worked. "The first time I tried to quit, I was like, *Oh my god, I feel like I'm in hell.*"

For adults in these Unprecedented Times, balancing the weight of everyday life with our chosen escape hatches can be absurdly perilous. It all just kind of spirals together—the appeal, the addiction, the optics, the shame. Vaping can feel at once like sweet relief and sharp embarrassment. Pretty much everyone I spoke to depended on the brief calm or euphoria a hit can give while also dependably hiding in the bathroom to get it.

I kicked my habit through six months of sobriety in 2022, when I decided I needed a major lifestyle change. My cravings eventually subsided enough for me to stop having a visceral reaction to any colored cylinder that vaguely resembled a vape. But...if I'm being honest, I still dabble. And if I'm being *really* honest, I opened a new vape as I was working on this story.

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The Coolest Places From the Coolest People

Because friends don't let friends book trips to played-out vacation spots.

BY HANNAH CHUBB



Olivia's Pick
SVETI STEFAN, MONTENEGRO

If you have been to Croatia and had to be damn near drogged out (same), immediately book a trip to Montenegro. Also in Southeast Europe, the laid-back country (where you can get a bottle of wine for less than the cost of a beer back home) is about to be all over your FYP, promises Olivia, who fell head over heels for Sveti Stefan, a tiny, 15th-century coastal town. "I went a few years ago and I'll never forget the colors," she says.

EAT & DRINK: *At Komoda Zaga, a local hangout with oodles of seafood.*

SLEEP: *At Villa Gabela, a luxe resort overlooking the pink-sand beach.*

VISIT: *The Praskvica Monastery, a working monastery in an olive grove.*



Toysha's Pick
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Winter wonderland chasers, this one's for you. "Geneva is so magical, especially during the holidays," says Toysha, who stopped in the city in 2019—hitting the Geneva Light festival and hopping around Place du Bourg-de-Four (the city's oldest square)—before going skiing in the Alps. "I seriously look like

a storybook. "No matter the time of year, expect cobblestone streets, chocolate baked goods, epic views of Lake Geneva, and more fondue than you can possibly stomach (although you should still try). "I wish I could have stayed," says Toysha. "I must return!"

EAT & DRINK: *Somewhere in Geneva, an entry community known for its cute cafe and terrace.*

SLEEP: *At Hotel d'Angleterre, a cool-friendly retreat on the lake with free boat shuttle service.*

VISIT: *Jan of Beau, a woman-led spa/skincare pop-up.*

480 feet in the air (you can't miss it).

Ladies Who Travel!

Just some of Girls sharing destinations that need to be on your radar. (No gatekeeping here.)



Olivia Culpo
The pageant queen turned host turned model turned *The Cupro Sisters* star is the definition of "globe-trotter." The tagged locations on her Insta feed, which are basically the whole world now, are proof.



Suni Lee
You may know her best from a certain event in Tokyo (where, yes, she won Olympic gold) but between gymnastics world championships and subsequent vacays, she's also on stronger to a glorious getaway.



Taysia Adams
Reality TV isn't always paradise, but the Bachelor Nation favorite spun her fame into a chance to jet-set. As a content creator, she shares FOMO—including snaps with her followers as she hops between countries.



Kelsea Ballerini
You kind of just end up going everywhere when you sell out multi-continent tours, and that's exactly what this country-pop singer-songwriter has been doing as of late—unapologetically, wernight add.

GETTY IMAGES.



Suni's Pick
LAO CAI, VIETNAM

"The next time I have a few weeks on my hands, I'd love to travel here. "Suni says of the big adventure she's dreaming about in the mountainous province in Northwest Vietnam. About five hours from Hanoi, Lao Cai has become a hot spot for its local markets, spiritual centers, and breathtaking scenery. Think misty sun-mists above your head and terraced rice fields beneath your toes. "Vietnam just has such a diverse landscape," she explains. "From beautiful cities to tropical and almost otherworldly bays."

EAT & DRINK: *At Alana Spa Restaurant & Bar, a popular venue for local gourmet cuisine.*

SLEEP: *At Hotel du Coucou, a open boutique hotel that opened in 2018.*

VISIT: *The Ban Meun Temple, an 18th-century piece of worship.*