



Smoking, Vaping, and Drinking Alcohol: Risks for COVID-19, Resources for Reducing your Risk

During these uncertain times of the COVID-19 pandemic, boredom, social isolation, and turmoil make it easy for us to turn to smoking, vaping, and drinking alcohol to cope.

Prior research has found that these feelings, along with major events that threaten our health and safety, are associated with increased use of substances, including drinking and smoking/vaping.

The latest science on COVID-19, in addition to what we already know about substance use and health, suggests that smoking and vaping (tobacco or marijuana) and heavy alcohol use may increase your risk of more severe symptoms and a higher risk of death if you contract the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

The coronavirus attacks the lungs and may be particularly dangerous for those who [smoke or vape tobacco and/or marijuana](#). Drinking alcohol, particularly heavy drinking, [reduces immunity and may increase your risk of complications](#) from COVID-19.

Dr. Katie Witkiewitz, editor of Psychology of Addictive Behaviors and Regents' Professor with UNM's Department of Psychology, Center on Alcoholism, Substance Abuse, and Addictions, has provided some resources to help you reduce your risk by changing your smoking, vaping, and drinking during this uncertain time.

Keep track of how much you are smoking/vaping/drinking.

Being aware of and monitoring how much you smoke, vape, and drink is one important step to understanding whether your use of substances is increasing during these difficult times. Tracking your level of [smoking](#) and [drinking](#) each day, and setting goals for how much you want to smoke/vape and drink can help you stay on track and not over-indulge in these behaviors out of a lack of awareness. There are free phone apps to help track or forms you can [access online](#).

Practice self-care and select non-substance alternatives to smoking/vaping/drinking when you are feeling stressed or anxious.

Using substances to "self-medicate" negative emotions, boredom, and anxiety can ultimately cause brain changes that make us more likely to intensely crave substances in the future.

Taking a moment to ask yourself what you really need in the moment and considering a range of [non-substance alternatives for self-care](#) can help reduce your risk of depending too much on substances to get through these difficult times.

These might include healthy snacks, exercise, reading, meditation, or social networking.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. If you need professional support to help you with stress, anxiety, or substance use, resources are available including [Student Health and Counseling](#) to

support students and [Counseling, Assistance and Referral Services \(CARS\)](#) to support faculty and staff.

If you are suffering from financial difficulties during this time, please visit the [State of New Mexico's I Need Assistance website](#) for numerous resources, including food, rent or utilities help, and unemployment assistance.

Interested in quitting or reducing your smoking/vaping/drinking?

Reducing smoking/vaping/drinking is associated with improvements in physical and mental health and overall well-being. There are many free and online resources to help you quit smoking/vaping and quit or reduce your drinking:

- The New Mexico Department of Health has [free quit smoking resources](#) that include a personal quit plan, signing up with a Quit Coach, and access to nicotine replacement products that can be shipped to you directly.
- Employee Wellness also has a list of smoking [cessation resources here](#).
- The National Institutes of Health also has free resources to help you learn more about your alcohol use and [free tools to help you reduce your drinking](#).

UNM Employee Wellness encourages you to be aware of the risks and utilize many forms of [self-care](#) to avoid turning to substances as a way of managing stress and anxiety. Employee Wellness offers numerous resources and programs help you stay healthy through a holistic approach to wellness.

Questions? Contact Employee Wellness at wellness@unm.edu, or contact Dr. Witkiewitz at katiew@unm.edu .