How to Choose Your Nicotine Strength When Switching from Smoking to Vaping

Getting the Strength Right from Day One

Making the switch from smoking to vaping is a big step, and one of the most common questions people have is about nicotine strength. Get it right, and the transition feels natural. Get it wrong, and you might end up feeling unsatisfied or put off altogether. For many smokers, especially those used to a regular pack-a-day habit, the answer lies in understanding what different strengths offer and how they relate to your smoking habits. This is where a practical nic salt strength guide becomes essential.

Understanding Nicotine Strengths and What They Mean

Nicotine concentration is measured in milligrams per millilitre (mg/ml). A 20mg nic salt liquid contains 20 milligrams of nicotine in every millilitre of e-liquid. That might sound like a lot, but because nicotine salts deliver nicotine into your system more efficiently than freebase nicotine, the experience is smoother. Freebase nicotine, which is the standard in most traditional e-liquids, tends to feel harsher on the throat at higher strengths, which is why it is often sold in lower concentrations like 3mg, 6mg, or 12mg. Nicotine salts, by contrast, allow higher strengths without the harsh throat hit, making them a better match for heavier smokers.

The Checklist for Finding Your Ideal Nicotine Strength

Rather than guessing, work through these five points. Each one helps narrow down the right strength for your personal smoking history and vaping style.

- **Check your current cigarette consumption.** How many cigarettes do you smoke each day? A light smoker (fewer than 10 a day) might start around 10mg or 12mg nic salts. A moderate smoker (10 to 20 a day) often finds 20mg nic salts a good starting point. Heavy smokers (20 or more a day) might need 20mg nic salts or even higher, though 20mg is the legal maximum for nicotine salts in the UK. Be honest about your daily intake; it is the single biggest clue to what you need.
- **Consider how you smoke.** Do you take long, deep drags or short, quick puffs? Do you chain-smoke or do you have a cigarette every hour or so? Your inhaling style affects how much nicotine you absorb. Long, slow draws from a vape device deliver more vapour and more nicotine per puff, so if you are used to deep inhales on cigarettes, a lower strength might still satisfy you. Quick, shallow puffers may want a higher strength to get enough nicotine per hit.

- **Think about the throat hit you prefer.** Some people enjoy a gentle sensation at the back of the throat, similar to the feeling of smoking. Others want it as smooth as possible. Nicotine salts are known for being smooth even at 20mg, so if throat hit is a concern, salts are a good choice. Freebase nicotine delivers more of a scratchy feel, especially above 12mg, which can be off-putting if you are not used to it. If you miss that mild kick, a mix of freebase and salts might work, but for most ex-smokers, straight nic salts feel more natural.
- **Match your device to the nicotine type.** Not all vape devices work well with all nicotine strengths. High-strength nic salts like 20mg are best used in low-wattage, mouth-to-lung (MTL) devices that produce less vapour and have a tighter draw, similar to a cigarette. Using high-strength salts in a powerful sub-ohm device can deliver too much nicotine too fast, leading to dizziness or discomfort. Check what your device is designed for. Most pod systems and starter kits clearly state whether they are compatible with nic salts or freebase liquids.
- **Plan your step down.** Very few people stick with the same strength forever. Once you have been vaping for a few weeks or months, you may want to reduce your nicotine intake gradually. This is called stepping down. A good nic salt strength guide will always mention this. Start at a level that keeps you off cigarettes, then after a month or two, try dropping to 10mg or 12mg. If you feel cravings, go back up a step. The goal is to find a sustainable level that keeps you from reaching for a cigarette, not to rush to zero nicotine.

Why 20mg Nic Salts Are a Common Starting Point

For many smokers in the UK, 20mg nic salts are the default recommendation. The reason is simple: the UK regulations cap nicotine salt e-liquids at 20mg, so it is the highest strength legally available. For someone smoking a pack a day of medium-strength cigarettes, 20mg provides a comparable nicotine hit per puff, especially when used in a low-wattage MTL device. The smoothness of salts means you can use that higher strength without coughing or irritation, which makes the switch much easier.



But 20mg is not right for everyone. Light smokers or those who only smoke a few cigarettes a day may find 20mg too strong, leading to headaches or nausea. In that case, a 10mg or 12mg nic salt liquid is a better fit. The key is to try a few strengths and see what feels comfortable. Many vape shops and online retailers sell sample packs or small bottles so you can test before committing to a larger purchase.

Freebase vs Nic Salts: Which One Works for You?

The difference between freebase nicotine and nicotine salts is not just about strength. Freebase nicotine is absorbed more slowly and provides a more gradual nicotine release, which some ex-smokers prefer because it mimics the slower uptake of a cigarette. Nicotine salts are absorbed faster, giving a quicker hit that can be more satisfying for those who feel

immediate cravings. If you are someone who gets irritable within an hour of your last cigarette, salts might be the better choice. If you are more relaxed about timing, freebase could work.

Some people combine both types. They might use a 20mg nic salt in a pod device for quick cravings in the morning or during a work break, and a lower-strength freebase liquid in a larger tank for longer, more leisurely sessions in the evening. That hybrid approach is common among experienced vapers, but for a beginner, sticking to one type and one device simplifies the learning curve.

How to Spot the Right Strength for You

Once you have a device and a bottle of liquid, the first few puffs will tell you a lot. If you feel a strong buzz, lightheadedness, or a racing heart, the strength is too high. If you feel nothing and still want a cigarette, it might be too low. The perfect strength should leave you feeling satisfied without any unpleasant symptoms. You should be able to vape a few puffs and then put the device down without thinking about it.



It is also worth paying attention to how often you vape. If you find yourself puffing constantly, the nicotine level might be too low, so you are compensating by taking more hits. If you take a few puffs and feel overwhelmed, it is too high. Adjust accordingly. There is no shame in trying a few different strengths before settling on one. Most vapers go through a short trial period.

Practical Tips for First-Time Vapers

When you first start vaping, your body is adjusting to a new way of getting nicotine. Cigarettes deliver nicotine through combustion, which creates a complex mix of chemicals that also affect how you feel. Vaping is cleaner, so the nicotine hit feels different. Give yourself at least a

week to adapt. During that time, keep a cigarette pack nearby if it helps reduce stress. Many people find they naturally prefer vaping after a few days.

Also, remember that nicotine strength is not the only factor. The flavour of the e-liquid matters a lot. If you dislike the taste, you will struggle to stick with it. Choose a flavour that appeals to you, whether that is a tobacco-like blend, a fruit, a dessert, or a menthol. A flavour you enjoy makes the switch much easier, regardless of the nicotine level.

When to Reassess Your Strength

After a few weeks, reassess. Your tolerance will change as your body gets used to vaping. You might find that 20mg nic salts feel too strong now, and you can drop to 12mg or 10mg. Or you might find you need to stay at 20mg to avoid cravings. There is no right or wrong timetable. The only goal is to stay away from cigarettes. If you ever feel tempted to buy a pack, your nicotine strength might need adjusting. Do not be afraid to move up or down as needed.



Many vapers eventually step down to 3mg or 6mg freebase or even 0mg, but that is a personal journey. Some stay at a moderate strength for years and are perfectly happy. The important thing is that you have a reliable nic salt strength guide that helps you make informed choices at each stage.

Final Thoughts

Choosing the right nicotine strength when switching to vaping does not have to be complicated. By considering your smoking habits, your preferred throat feel, your device, and your long-term goals, you can find a strength that works for you. Start with a reasonable guess

based on your daily cigarette count, then adjust based on how you feel. With a bit of trial and patience, you will quickly settle into a vaping routine that keeps you satisfied and cigarette-free.