

## Dangers of Vaping

My freshman year of high school was filled with enough change and evolution to constitute an entirely new reality, but the biggest change was the advent of vaping culture. By the end of the first semester of the school year, everyone had seemingly made their decision on whether or not they would vape, and those who did became quickly addicted. The bathrooms became juul rooms, vaping during class became a contest, and it even permeated its way into athletics. I was surrounded by nicotine at almost every waking moment of my life, and as a baby in high school life, I had no idea what to do.

The knowledge of what vaping would do to my body-- the damage to lungs, asthma, nicotine addiction and withdrawals, shaking, heart disease, heart attacks, and general stress of hiding the habit from the adults around-- flooded my mind at any instance it was presented to me. I was petrified of having my health fail at my own hands. I have always been anxious by nature, so the idea of taking on a habit that would require hiding, was terrifying. To me, the immediate consequences of being caught by a teacher or my parents seemed more severe than anything a vape could do to me, and it was effective enough to keep me away long enough to solidify my choices.

Months passed, and I entered my first highschool soccer season. Conditioning began and the crisp cool air rushed into my lungs for hours every day after school. When practices got tough and the stamina of lungs truly kicked in, many older players on the team referred to us freshmen as having “baby lungs” (i.e. vape free lungs). It felt both condescending and wishful in nature when directed at me, but it was enough to make the self-conscious thoughts wreck my brain. What could hitting someone’s juul one time do? Am I a normal teenager even though I don’t vape? What are the older players thinking about me?

Every time those thoughts started, I had to consciously turn them down to keep living a life free of addiction. My athletic ability, health, and lasting quality of life were more important than the pressures I felt around me, and as I have grown a few years since then, I can confidently say that no one cared. People made light-hearted jokes about those who did not vape; but deep down, they did not care that I, Jaden Musacchio, did not want to use their juul. They simply laughed and moved on. I was not any less a teenager because I did not start a new habit. I was just a teenager feeling like everyone cared about what I did, when in reality they couldn't care less.

This feeling that everyone was concerned with what I did was felt by my closest friends and other peers, and I would say is part of the reason why they began vaping in the first place. The pressures of being in high school and wanting to fit in and merge into the crowd reigned

supreme, so when the crowd began to vape, those on the edges did too to establish their place. Vaping made high schoolers feel like adults, but it also had effects that lasted until adulthood.

The challenges of high school hit even harder as the grades progressed, leading more people to turn to vaping as a way to soothe their nerves and calm down at the end of a long day. The nicotine provided a buzz that made life pause for a few moments, and that pause was enough to rope them in. It was almost enough to rope me in as well. As I sat in Precalculus with enough pressure built up in me to explode, I couldn't help but think of the look of relief on people's faces when they vaped. All I wanted was for the nerves to pause, which nicotine would do (while simultaneously creating a mental and physical dependence), but my mom's lectures about addictive personalities stopped my plan in its tracks. I was reminded of my grandparents who have smoked for 40 years, my aunts and uncles who are dependent on alcohol, and the vow I made to not hinge my life on a temporary vice.

My genetic predisposition to addiction and personal knowledge of my own addictive tendencies is the deciding factor that prevents me from vaping. I could not be a person that uses a vape on occasion for fun; I would be the person going through a pod a day. The kind of use that would accompany my body's reaction to the adrenaline that entices most users would lead me down a path directly to detrimental physical results. I would have ended up unable to play soccer because my lungs could not maintain the oxygen levels I need while running, been constantly sick and coughing, and at a permanent disadvantage for the rest of my life.

The lifetime of addiction is more prevalent now than it was at the onset of vaping in schools. Initially, people vaped recreationally or socially, hitting their friend's a couple times when partying, but as the trend died down, many were left with a legitimate addiction they could not shake. Almost all made bathroom breaks to have nicotine and stop the shakes during class. They had to find money to cover a habit becoming harder to support because of laws changing the age to buy nicotine to 21. Those who played sports had to work even harder to stay in shape because their lungs could not handle it. Those who already had lung and breathing problems had those amplified. The especially unlucky ones had sickness after sickness because their immune system could not handle the petri dish of high school. It is safe to say that those who began vaping in 2017 and still are, will be hooked until a monumental event shakes the reliance on nicotine in their life.

As the Coronavirus pandemic swept the planet, it was the Earth-shattering event that forced some of the largest nicotine fiends to abandon their vice. Those who stopped vaping in hopes of reducing their risk of Covid-19 went through the symptoms of withdrawal: shaking, anger, fatigue, nausea, depression, insomnia, etc. in extreme senses unlike the headaches and off behavior after only a few hours of not vaping. Those who continued to vape have put themselves in a high risk category they may not have initially belonged to. They have gone from being

young and healthy, to being young with a compromised respiratory system that the virus could destroy. The effects of Coronavirus have only added to the already long list of the dangers of vaping.

Vaping became the new source of peer pressure when I entered high school. I was young and naive, but I managed to avoid the habit long enough to realize the dangers and downfalls that hid behind fruity flavors and temporary release. My knowledge on the effects of nicotine and my family history of addiction kept me away from a habit that could have derailed my life if I had made a different choice. If I had become dependent on vaping, I would have lost the pride I have for myself and my strength that has kept me going on the right path this far and will push me into college and life beyond.