

What Is Menthol?

Menthol is a substance naturally found in mint plants, such as peppermint and spearmint. It gives a cooling sensation and is often used to relieve minor pain and irritation. Menthol is added to products as a flavoring including cough drops, beverages, gum and candy. However, none of these products are smoked or inhaled when used. Tobacco companies on the other hand, are using this natural plant in cigarettes and other electronic nicotine devices, making smokers think that menthol makes the product less harmful when used. These nicotine products are not safer when menthol is added to them.



Why do tobacco companies use menthol in the cigarettes?

Tobacco companies use menthol to help smokers tolerate cigarette smoke. Menthol may help soothe the irritation to the throat and airways caused by tobacco smoke and nicotine vapors. Advertisements emphasize the cool and refreshing taste of menthol cigarettes. The soothing taste makes a cigarette more appealing to teens between 12 and 17 years of age, and is frequently the “starter” product for people who become chronic cigarette users. The ads often show images of nature, springtime, water, and other refreshing qualities. This is how tobacco companies target “beginner” smokers, smokers with health concerns, and minority groups.

Menthol allows many smokers to take easier and deeper inhalations and feel less irritation in their throat while smoking. Menthol is currently the *only* flavor that can be added to conventional cigarettes by law. Menthol cigarettes represent about 25% (one quarter) of the total combustible cigarette market.

What is the harm in smoking menthol cigarettes?

There is no evidence that cigarettes, cigars, or smokeless tobacco products that have menthol are safer than other cigarettes. In fact smoking menthol cigarettes, like other cigarettes, can lead to a number of health issues including heart and lung disease and cancers. In the last decade, after many public efforts to promote smoking cessation, the use of non-menthol cigarettes has declined, while menthol cigarette use has remained the same. Smoking menthol cigarettes makes it much harder to stop smoking.

What is the harm of menthol in e-cigarettes and other vaping products?

The same reasons why adding menthol to conventional cigarettes is of concern applies to e-cigarettes and other vaping products. Menthol helps in tolerating inhaled e-cigarette aerosols and it reduces the breakdown of nicotine contained in e-cigarettes. Flavorings have been cited as the main reason for teenagers to try vaping and menthol flavored e-cigarette products are the second most popular flavor among adults and high schoolers. In addition, flavored e-cigarettes, particularly menthol-flavored e-cigarettes, are associated with greater user satisfaction and perceived addiction.

Why are menthol cigarettes so addictive?

Studies show higher rates of tobacco (nicotine) addiction while using menthol cigarettes compare to cigarettes that do not contain menthol. Menthol reduces the metabolism (breakdown by the body) of nicotine. It also slows one's breathing and enhances nicotine's presence in the lungs. Even if a smoker is smoking less using a menthol cigarette, he or she is just as likely to experience smoking-related diseases and premature death.

Why do African American smokers disproportionately use menthol cigarettes?

African Americans have been viewed by the tobacco industry as a group with significant market growth potential and have been one of the main target groups of menthol cigarette advertising. The average age for African American teens to start smoking is 16.9 years versus 15.7 years for the rest of population.

To attract African American youth, the tobacco industry has designed targeted marketing such as placing more advertisements for menthol cigarettes in magazines with a largely African American readership, and providing discount coupons and free samples of menthol cigarettes at sports and music events with large African American attendance. More than 80% of African-American smokers currently use menthol cigarettes.

African Americans suffer higher rates of smoking related health problems, even though they smoke at similar rates as white Americans. Smoking menthol cigarettes is also linked with higher risks of disease and lower rates of cessation, especially among African American smokers.

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Rx Action Plan

- ✓ Support legislation to remove menthol from e-cigarettes and vaping products.
- ✓ Take steps that make it harder for youth to use tobacco, such as reaching out to legislators to raise cigarette prices and enforce laws that prohibit the sale of tobacco to children and teens and remove all flavorings including menthol from tobacco products.
- ✓ Switch off of menthol containing products and use treatments for nicotine dependence. For more help, www.thoracic.org/patients or <https://smokefree.gov/quit-smoking/ecigs-menthol-dip/menthol>

Doctor's Office Telephone:

Resources:**Smokefree.gov**

<https://smokefree.gov/quit-smoking/ecigs-menthol-dip/menthol>

CDC's Office on Menthol Products

https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/tobacco_industry/menthol-cigarettes/index.html

Truth Initiative. Menthol: Facts, stats, and regulations

<https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/traditional-tobacco-products/menthol-facts-stats-and-regulations>

Science Direct

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0306460318311821?via%3Dihub>

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