

Review

Alterations of Mitochondrial Network by Cigarette and e-Cigarette Vaping

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Abstract: Toxins present in cigarette and e-cigarette smoke constitute a significant cause of illnesses and are known to have fatal health impacts. Specific mechanisms by which toxins present in smoke impair cell repair are still being researched and are of prime interest for developing more effective treatments. Current literature suggests toxins present in cigarette smoke and aerosolized e-vapor trigger abnormal intercellular responses, damage mitochondrial function, and consequently disrupt the homeostasis of the organelle's biochemical processes by increasing reactive oxidative species. Increased oxidative stress sets off a cascade of molecular events, disrupting optimal mitochondrial morphology and homeostasis. Furthermore, smoking-induced oxidative stress may also amalgamate with other health factors to contribute to various pathophysiological processes. An increasing number of studies show that toxins may affect mitochondria even though exposure to secondhand or thirdhand smoke. This review assesses the impact of toxins present in tobacco smoke and e-vapor on mitochondrial health, networking, and critical structural processes including mitochondria fission, fusion, hyperfusion, fragmentation, and mitophagy. The efforts are focused on discussing current evidence linking toxins present in first, second, and thirdhand smoke to mitochondrial dysfunction

Keywords: Cigarette smoking; e-cigarette smoking; mitochondria; fusion; fission

1. Introduction.

Cigarette smoking (CS), E-cigarette (EC) vaping, and other types of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke, including second and thirdhand smoke, are dangerous to human health, causing diseases that affect every organ system¹⁻⁴. Despite thorough documentation of the extensive damages caused by smoking, it continues to be one of the most prevalent public health concerns worldwide, claiming millions of lives each year². Primary and secondary exposure to tobacco smoke significantly raises the risk of cancer⁵⁻⁷, coronary heart disease⁸⁻¹⁰, stroke^{11, 12}, bacterial and viral infections, and has detrimental impacts during pregnancy¹³⁻¹⁵.

The detrimental effects of tobacco smoke are not limited to smokers. Non-smokers exposed to second and thirdhand smoke in the environment also show an increased risk for health concerns⁴. Cigarette smoke is composed of thousands of chemicals, of which many are volatile, carcinogenic, and cause DNA damage¹⁶⁻¹⁸. These chemicals can reside in the environment until inhaled by non-smokers to continue causing devastating health impacts. Secondhand smoke (SHS) is a mixture of what is exhaled by the smoker and what

is emitted by the burning tobacco product, whereas thirdhand smoke (THS) is the residue that accumulates from SHS deposited onto surfaces and can exist in the environment for a long time.

E-cigarettes, also known as electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), were first introduced and marketed as a healthier alternative to cigarettes and to help with smoking cessation¹⁹. However, new dangers continue to present themselves as ENDS use continues to rise among young adults and adolescents²⁰. E-cigarette liquid (e-liquid) is composed of various agents, typically a solvent, nicotine and additional flavoring compounds suspended in a humectant inhaled as an aerosol²¹. Despite the original intention to reduce the detrimental impacts of tobacco smoking, ENDS are largely unregulated and pose increasing concerns as they are proving to be toxic for neonates^{22, 23}, vascular health^{24, 25}, respiratory health²⁶, and damaging to the oral cavity²⁷.

This paper discusses the pathophysiological mechanisms by which toxicants from tobacco smoke and ENDS negatively impact mitochondrial function. Mitochondria maintain cell metabolism, regulate major pathways and dictate cellular and extracellular responses. As central organelles that meet cell's most energy demands, mitochondria regulate oxidative stress, cell proliferation, and inflammation. Most radicals and reactive oxidative species found within cells are produced and scavenged by mitochondria. Mitochondria also play a vital role in redox signaling²⁸, cell cycle regulation, differentiation, DNA exchange between cells to restore function, and apoptosis. As a result of their critical role in cell survival and proliferation, mitochondria are often an organelle of interest when studying cellular mechanisms impacting multiple disease processes. Furthermore, mitochondrial susceptibility to damage by exposure to toxicants justifies investigating the impact of environmental chemicals on the organelle²⁹. The effects of inhaled toxicants can include inhibition of ATP synthesis due to uncoupling of oxidative phosphorylation³⁰, increased oxidative mitochondrial damage³¹, and mitochondria-initiated apoptosis³².

Disruptions in mitochondrial function can result from impaired morphology, disruptions in fusion and fission events, increased oxidative stress, or even mutations within the mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA). Impaired mitochondrial morphology and function are implicated in the pathogenesis of pulmonary³³, neurodegenerative³⁴, diabetic kidney diseases³⁵, can be pro-tumorigenic³⁶, and can potentiate inflammatory responses³⁷. Mitochondrial DNA, a circular chromosome found within the organelle maintained by nuclear-encoded proteins³⁸, is another component that can contribute to disease if damaged³⁹. Mutations in mitochondrial DNA are responsible for numerous diseases such as optic atrophy⁴⁰, mitochondrial myopathy⁴¹, and diabetes mellitus⁴².

1. The Mitochondrial Fusion and Fission Machinery

The mitochondria's dynamic and healthy nature is dependent on inter-organelle crosstalk and key processes, including mitochondrial fusion, fission, mitoptosis, and mitophagy⁴³⁻⁴⁶. The joint forces of mitochondrial fusion and fission, maintained by dynamin and mitofusins, support robust and optimal network morphology^{30, 47, 48}, and respond to physiological conditions⁴⁹. On the contrary, an imbalance in the proteins determining mitochondrial dynamics can aggravate type 2 diabetes⁵⁰, neurodegenerative diseases^{51, 52}, and can be embryonically lethal^{53, 54}.

Defective mitochondria are disposed of through mitochondrial fission⁵⁵, whereas mtDNA exchange and rescue of damaged mitochondria can happen through fusion⁵⁶. The dynamin superfamily contains a variety of ubiquitous GTPases involving multiple processes including regulating mitochondrial fission. Dynamin-related protein 1 (Drp1) is known to play a critical role in mitochondrial homeostasis by forming fission rings to eliminate damaged parts of the mitochondrial membrane. Drp1 binding requires the presence of different proteins, including Mitochondrial Fission 1 Protein (FIS1) on the outer mitochondrial membrane, mitochondrial dynamics proteins 49kDa (MiD49), 51kDa (MiD51)⁵⁷, and mitochondrial fission factor (MFF)⁵⁸. Mitochondrial fission is also dependent on the presence of another class of GTPases known as mitofusins⁵⁹. Mitofusins 1 and

2, located at the outer mitochondrial membrane, reciprocally interact with Drp1 to enable fission⁶⁰, support proper embryological development and enhance mitochondrial cooperation to prevent respiratory dysfunction⁶¹. The mitochondrial dynamin-like GTPase, Optic atrophy 1 (OPA1), is located on the inner mitochondrial membrane (IMM) and induces fusion when there is a loss of membrane potential, therefore strongly linking it to oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS)⁶². We demonstrated mitochondrial fusion and fission in cartoon Figure 1.

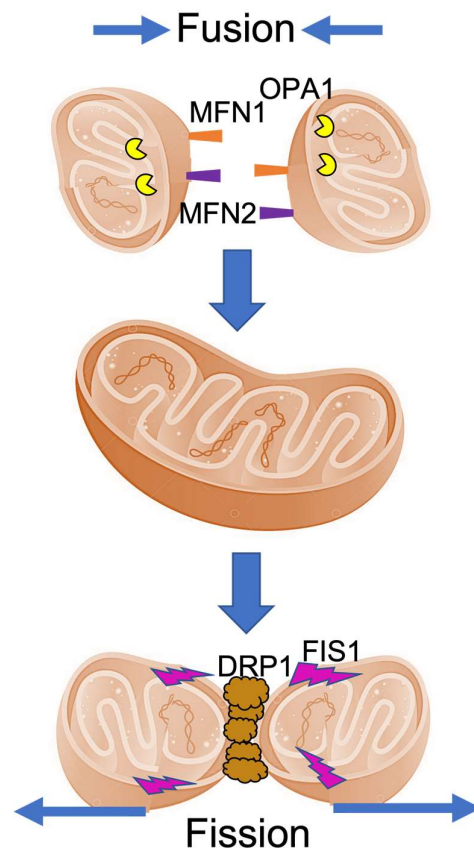


Figure 1. Schematic cartoon of mitochondrial fusion and fission. Mitochondrial fusion occurs when two mitochondria fuse together, whereas fission occurs when one mitochondrion splits into two. Fusion is coordinated on the OMM by the mitofusins (MFN1 and MFN2), and on the IMM by optic atrophy 1 (OPA1). In fission, FIS1 and drp1 are largely involved.

Apart from fusion and fission, mitophagy is another critical process that degrades mitochondria through autophagy. PTEN-induced putative kinase 1 (Pink1), present on the outer mitochondrial membrane, initiates the clearance of defective mitochondria through mitophagy, which is a critical process often seen impaired in various pathological conditions⁶³⁻⁶⁵. Pink1 works with Parkin, an E3 ubiquitin ligase, to degrade Mfn2, consequently clearing out the defective mitochondria. If any part of Pink1/Parkin machinery is impaired, dysfunctional mitochondria will not be eliminated, further aggravating pathophysiological processes⁶³. In this way, mitophagy is quintessential to protecting optimal mitochondrial form and function and operates on multi-tiered processes^{66, 67}. Failure to initiate mitophagy or reduction in its process promotes mitochondrial oxidative stress. This failure sets off a cascade of imbalanced signaling pathways, which can accelerate disease processes, including neurodegenerative and cardiovascular conditions⁶⁸⁻⁷⁰.

1. Cigarette Smoke and E-cigarettes Vape Extraction

In vitro effects of cigarette smoke and e-cigarette vapor are best studied through cell culture media, and consequentially various systems have been developed over time to accommodate studies conducted in larger or small chambers. We will quickly review two examples of how extraction systems are set up. SV Teague et al. developed a method for smaller chambers that is specifically useful for maintaining consistent levels of total suspended particles to replicate relevant environmental conditions of smoke exposure better⁷¹. Generating smoke requires a system to have both cigarette holding and lighting devices. A metered puff controller can then operate the smoke puffs through a flow machine. Afterward, the chimneys in the conditioning chamber dilute the smoke puffs, and the delivery system distributes smoke to each chamber containing animal or cell-culture sample. Abouassali O et al. extracted e-vapor in cell culture media to study the in vitro toxicity of flavored e-liquids⁷². A 10-cm × 10-cm × 7-cm chamber was made with a bottom opening fitted for the vaping device's mouthpiece. The chamber contained inlet and outlet openings on the top of the lid. The inlet tube received air through an air pump connected to a flow meter, whereas the outlet tube delivered the e-vapor to the cell culture media. Regulating the vacuum connected to flow meter enabled control of puff size and lead to bubbling of the vapor into the cell culture medium⁷². The bubbling of cigarette smoke and e-cigarettes vapor extraction into cell culture media is shown Figure 2.

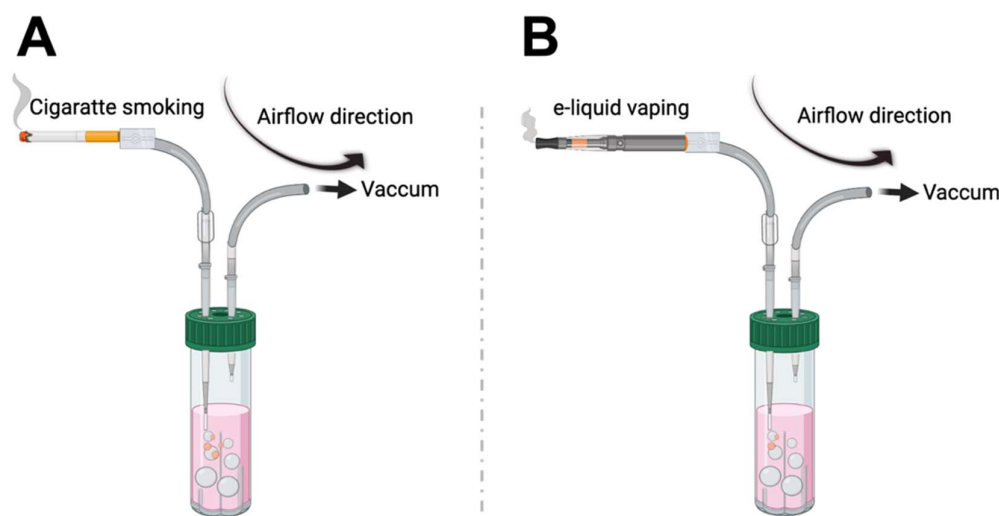


Figure 2. Schematic illustration of cigarette smoke extract (A) and e-liquid vaping (B) into cell culture media.

3.1. Cigarette Smoke (CS) and Cigarette Smoke Extract (CSE) Trigger Mitochondrial ROS

Mitochondrial reactive oxygen species (mtROS) are invaluable intermediates of cell signaling pathways. Their production integrates various biochemical processes to sustain cell survival, signaling, and energetics⁷³. The four parts of the electron transport chain make ATP and maintain the organelle's electrochemical potential, which signals the proper function and integration of other metabolic and cellular processes. Disruption in one or more of the processes supporting healthy mitochondrial populations and networking has multifaceted implications and can disrupt the organelle's ability to regulate ROS levels. In excess, mtROS can contribute to mitochondrial dysfunction and in many diseases⁷⁴⁻⁷⁶. This undeniable influence of mtROS on other signaling pathways is a key mechanism often implicated by inhaled toxicants^{33, 77-79}.

Wang Z et al. found that CS increased oxidative stress, reduced respiration, and disrupted the balance of mitochondrial fusion and fission, resulting in altered mitochondrial morphology in primary rat lung microvascular endothelial cells (LMVEC). CS shortened and minimized mitochondrial networks resulting in perinuclear accumulation of

damaged mitochondria primarily through increasing mitochondrial fission by decreasing Drp1-S637 and increasing FIS1, Drp1-S616 phosphorylation⁸⁰. Furthermore, CS caused declining Mfn2 in LMVEC and mouse lungs which reduced mitochondrial fusion and caused mitochondrial translocation, and tetramerization⁸⁰. Smoking has been shown to aggravate oxidative DNA damage due to ROS generated from mitochondrial respiration⁸¹ and can increase mtDNA mutations, in the buccal cells of smokers⁸².

Cigarette smoke extract (CSE), in vivo, has been shown to increase both oxidative stress and mitochondrial activity in human fetal fibroblast strains, human lung fibroblast HFL-1 and L828, while also reducing mitochondrial membrane potential to increase cell apoptosis⁸³. Similar increases in reactive oxidative species in bronchial epithelial cells utilized lipophilic components of CSE to disrupt mitochondrial function⁸⁴. It has been demonstrated that CSE triggers a proadaptive survival mitochondrial hyperfusion in mouse alveolar epithelial cells accompanied by increased levels of MFN2 within 24h of 10% or 20% CSE treatment⁸⁵. These proadaptive mitochondrial morphology changes were accompanied by increased metabolic activity, ATP levels, and mitochondrial superoxide formation⁸⁵.

Hara et al. showed that human bronchial epithelial cells underwent mitochondrial fragmentation and mitochondrial ROS production upon exposure to Cigarette smoke extract, which increased the percentage of cellular death⁸⁶. Whole cigarette smoke condensates (WCSC) decreased cell viability in the normal human bronchial epithelial cell line (BEAS-2B) in a dose-dependent manner and disrupted mitochondrial homeostasis by inducing hypoxic conditions⁸⁷.

In human airway smooth muscle, CSE increased Drp1 and reduced mfn2 in a concentration-dependent fashion, which induced mitochondrial fragmentation and damaged morphology by reducing mitochondrial branching and branch length⁸⁸. Furthermore, Aravamudan et al. showed how fusion-fission protein disruption could negatively influence ROS production, cell proliferation, and apoptosis in airway diseases such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD)⁸⁸. Long-term CSE in COPD primary bronchial epithelial cells induced mitochondrial fragmentation and altered morphology by reducing the number of cristae⁸⁹. These changes in morphology were noted alongside increases in oxidative stress markers, OXPHOS proteins, proinflammatory mediators, and expression of fission and fusion markers.

3.2. The Role of Nicotine in Mitochondrial Dysfunction

Nicotine is one of the many thousands of compounds present in cigarette smoke and commonly found in ENDS. Nicotine exerts its effect by activating nicotinic acetylcholine receptors (nAChRs), present throughout the body, and has been shown to modulate mitochondrial dynamics in hippocampal neurons⁹⁰, lung cancer^{91, 92}, and can impact fetal and neonatal development⁹³.

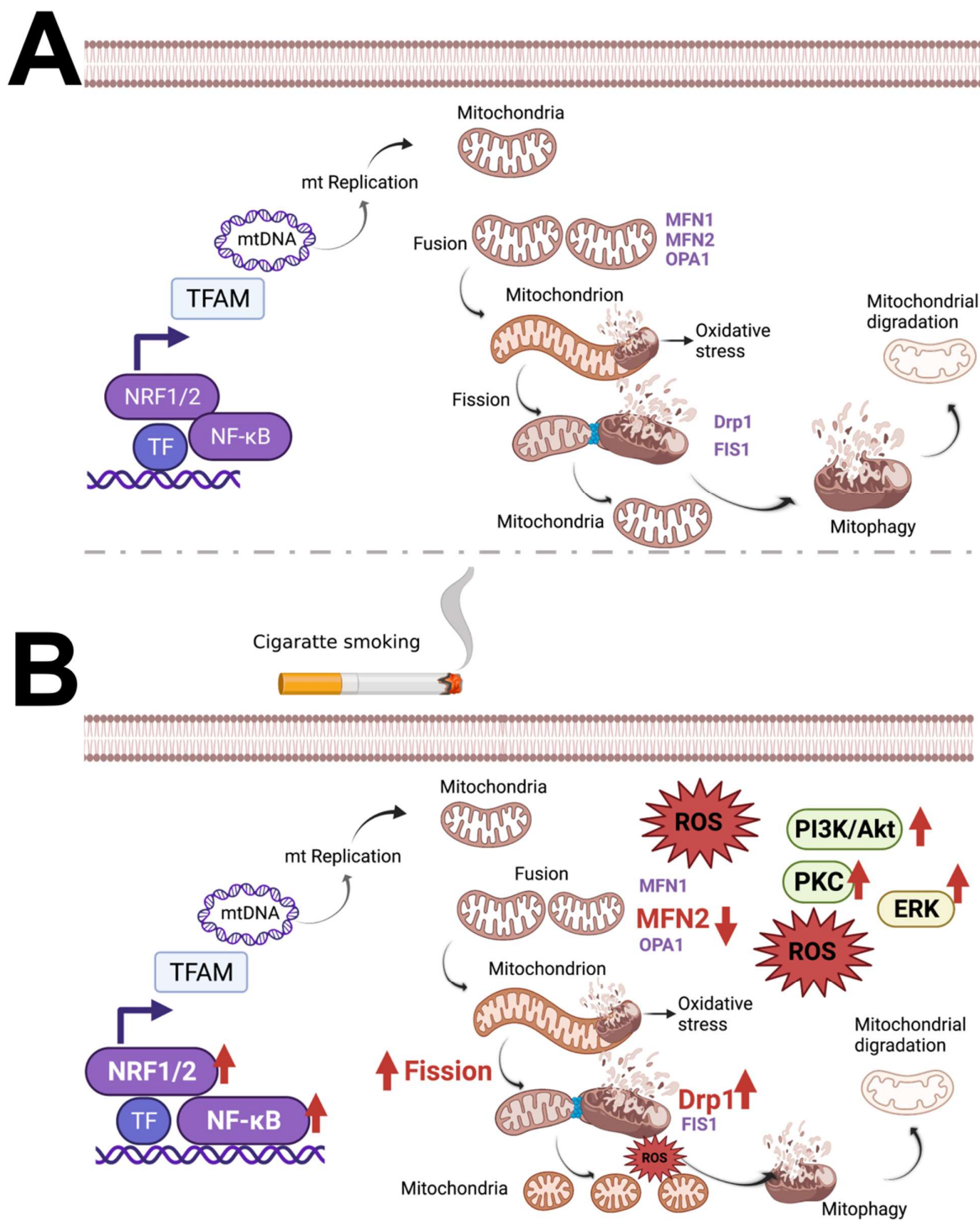


Figure 3. Mitochondrial quality control pathways in healthy cells and CSE treated cells. A. Mitochondrial biogenesis and network regulation rely on key transcription factors and various proteins to maintain the processes needed for the organelle's homeostasis. Mitochondrial transcription factor A (TFAM) acts on mtDNA after being imported into mitochondria and is an essential transcription factor needed to encode mitochondrial proteins. The first of these proteins transcribed include electron transport chain subunits to increase and maintain the appropriate number of mitochondria to sustain oxygen consumption and ATP synthesis. Secondly, fusion proteins (MFN, MFN2, and OPA1) and fission proteins (Drp1 and FIS1) are transcribed to maintain healthy morphology by excising and clearing out damaged portions of the organelle. Mitophagy, a specialized autophagic

pathway, eventually recycles the discarded mitochondrial components⁹⁴. B. In human airway smooth muscle, CS disrupts mitochondrial homeostasis by causing morphological changes and dysfunction. CS-induced mitochondrial fragmentation and damage to networked morphology occurs in a concentration-dependent fashion. CS also increased Drp1 expression, decreased Mfn2, and involved ROS. Furthermore, NF- κ B and nuclear erythroid 2-related factor 2 (NRF2) lead to a transcriptional upregulation and increased = activation of extracellular signal-regulated kinase (ERK), phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase (PI3K)/protein kinase B (Akt), and protein kinase C (PKC)⁶⁰.

A previously done western blot analysis revealed that nicotine induced mitochondrial fragmentation in human multipotent embryonal carcinoma cell line NT2/D1 by significantly decreasing Mfn1 and Mfn2⁹⁵. Hirata et al. confirmed the mechanism by using a nonselective nAChR antagonist, which effectively blocked nicotine-induced reduction of Mfn1 and Mfn2 protein levels, ATP levels, and mitochondrial fragmentation. Guo et al. proved that in non-small cell lung cancer cells, nicotine-induced activation of hypoxia-inducible factor (HIF)-1 α was dependent on mitochondrial-dependent ROS activating downstream Akt and MAPK signaling pathways,⁹¹ figure 3. Maternal nicotine, regardless of cigarette smoking or nicotine replacement therapy, induces oxidative stress targeting the mitochondria as well as β -cell apoptosis in the pancreas, negatively impacting the offspring⁹³.

3.3. Constituents of fluids used in ENDS are cytotoxic and impair mitochondrial function

As the number of flavors available for e-cigarettes continues to increase, more studies must be done to understand the impact of various flavors and solvents on health⁹⁶. Currently, studies present evidence for the varying toxicity of different flavors, indicating the need to generate a profile of which compounds could be more toxic^{72, 97-99}. Some of these flavors and their toxicities will be discussed in this section before further expanding on studies specific to mitochondrial function. Cinnamaldehyde or vanillin-flavored e-vapor was toxic in HL-1 cardiomyocytes and compromised cardiac electrophysiology⁷². H292 human bronchial epithelial cells exposed to strawberry-flavored e-vapor had reduced metabolic activity, reduced cell viability, and increased interleukin release⁹⁷. Cooper et al. demonstrated how vaping-related reinforcement behavior is elevated in male mice when self-administering menthol or green-apple flavored e-liquid compared to no flavor e-liquids⁹⁸. Farnesol, a component of green apple flavor, has been shown to significantly increase nicotine-reward related behavior by altering baseline firing of GABA neurons and upregulating nAChR function, especially in male mice⁹⁹. Interestingly enough, although ENDS are commonly advertised as a safer alternative to cigarette smoking, ECE was found to cause cardiomyocyte toxicities and generate oxidative stress similar to CSE¹⁰⁰. Jabba et al. demonstrated that solvent adducts of reactive flavor aldehydes are more cytotoxic on lung epithelial cells (BEAS-2B and A549) than their parent aldehydes due to the rapid chemical reaction they undergo with e-liquid solvents, propylene glycol, and vegetable glycerol (PG/VG). Furthermore, these reactive flavor aldehydes reduced ATP synthesis, inhibited mitochondrial function, and were more cytotoxic than their parent aldehydes¹⁰¹. Williams et al., demonstrated that MTT assay marked cytotoxicity of two potent chemical toxins in EC solvents, Selenium and Arsenic. Both chemicals inhibited mitochondrial reductases in BEAS-2B cells and proved toxic for pulmonary fibroblasts, whereas selenium increased superoxide production in mitochondria¹⁰².

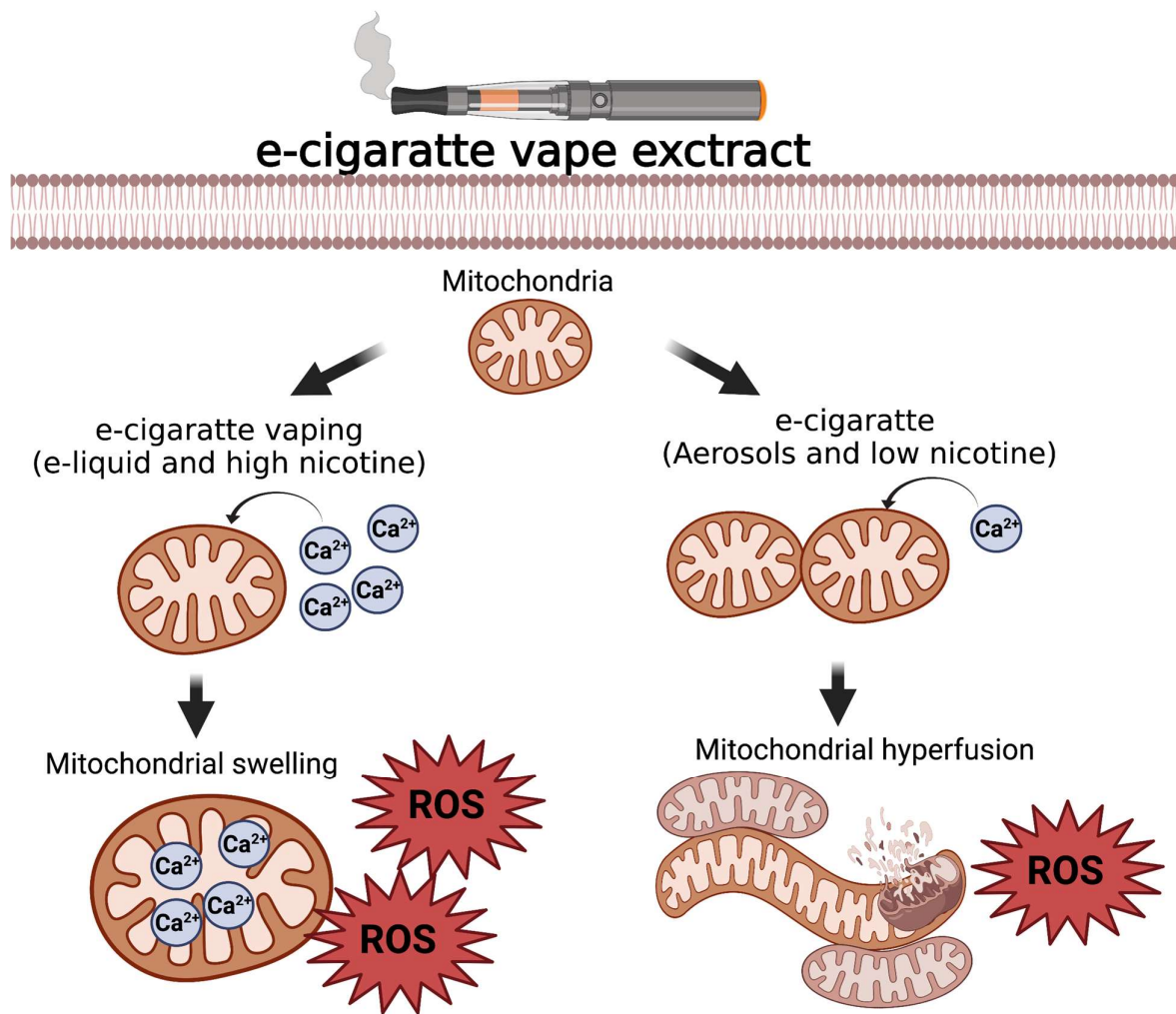


Figure 4. The effects of EC vaping on mitochondrial function. The EC vaping with high concentration of nicotine causes mitochondrial swelling associated with the mitochondrial calcium overload and increases ROS. The EC vaping with aerosols and low nicotine concentration causes mitochondrial hyperfusion associated with stress and elevates the ROS.

4. Maternal Health

The dangers of smoking during pregnancy have long been elucidated, and smoking cessation is advised for the duration of pregnancy. If smoking cessation is impossible, replacing cigarettes with EC is generally advised. Shifting to EC has shown benefits in pregnancy such as restored hepatic lipid metabolism¹⁰³; however, ENDS still pose cytotoxic if used during pregnancy¹⁰⁴. A previous assessment of *in vitro* and animal models highlighted the multifaceted mechanisms through which ENDS impacted pre and postnatal brain development¹⁰⁵. Female Balb/c mice exposed to e-vapor, with and without nicotine, for six weeks before mating showed detrimental changes along with their offspring¹⁰⁶. EC aerosols and aerosols containing copper nanoparticles elevated mtROS and impaired the stability of electron transport chain (ETC) complex IV in human lung fibroblasts (HFL-1)¹⁰⁷. Lerner et al. noted that these mitochondrial changes were associated with increased genotoxicity and increased levels of cytokines IL-8 and IL-6. Nicotine and e-cigarette condensate have been shown to disrupt mitochondria by inhibiting OXPHOS complex III and increasing mtROS¹⁰⁸. This increased mitochondrial dysregulation in redox

signaling was ensued by inhibition of myofibroblast differentiation critical for proper development in HLF-1, which further impaired wound healing¹⁰⁸. Zahedi et al. demonstrated that the mechanism behind EC-induced stem cell toxicity is stress-induced mitochondrial hyperfusion (SIMH), which results in a transitory survival, followed by increasing mitochondrial oxidative stress¹⁰⁹. SIMH is identified as a survival response to the nicotine and is largely present in EC refill fluids called do-it-yourself EC products¹⁰⁹. They also observed that EC leads to cellular stress and diminishes cellular health in the stem cell population, elevates cellular aging, and develops mitochondriopathies¹⁰⁹. We illustrated EC effect on mitochondria function in figure 4. Maternal vaping during pregnancy may not be as extensively studied as maternal smoking during pregnancy but is a critical and imperative area to be considered when designing further studies.

5. Thirdhand Smoke

While the health impacts of thirdhand cigarette smoke (THS) are still being studied, it is undeniably a crucial component to address regarding public and environmental health. Although experiments on the hazardous nature of THS are limited, an emerging set of data points to reasons not to exclude THS from future studies assessing risk factors. THS has been shown to cause stress-induced mitochondrial hyperfusion (SIMH) in mouse neural stem cells along with increased mitochondrial membrane potential (MMP), increased ATP levels, increased superoxide production, and increased oxidation of mitochondrial proteins¹¹⁰. SIMH can also dysregulate gene regulation and transcription has been shown to reduce mitochondrial fission protein Fis1 expression¹¹⁰, figure 5. In vivo exposure to THS increased AST, urea, and nuclear respiratory factor-1 (NRF1) levels in a time-dependent manner leading to increased liver dysfunction and mitochondrial dysfunction within the liver¹¹¹. THS exposure has been shown to reduce the liver's antioxidant potential in time-dependent manner. This reduction of liver function was seen with some key changes such as, increased oxidative stress, reduced ATP levels, and increased lactate, indicating mitochondrial dysfunction within the liver¹¹¹. Adhami et al. proposed that the connection between the dysfunctional changes was due to a presence of significantly higher TNF- α levels which could play a role in mitochondrial dysfunction given the cytokine's role in many inflammatory and cell death pathways¹¹¹.

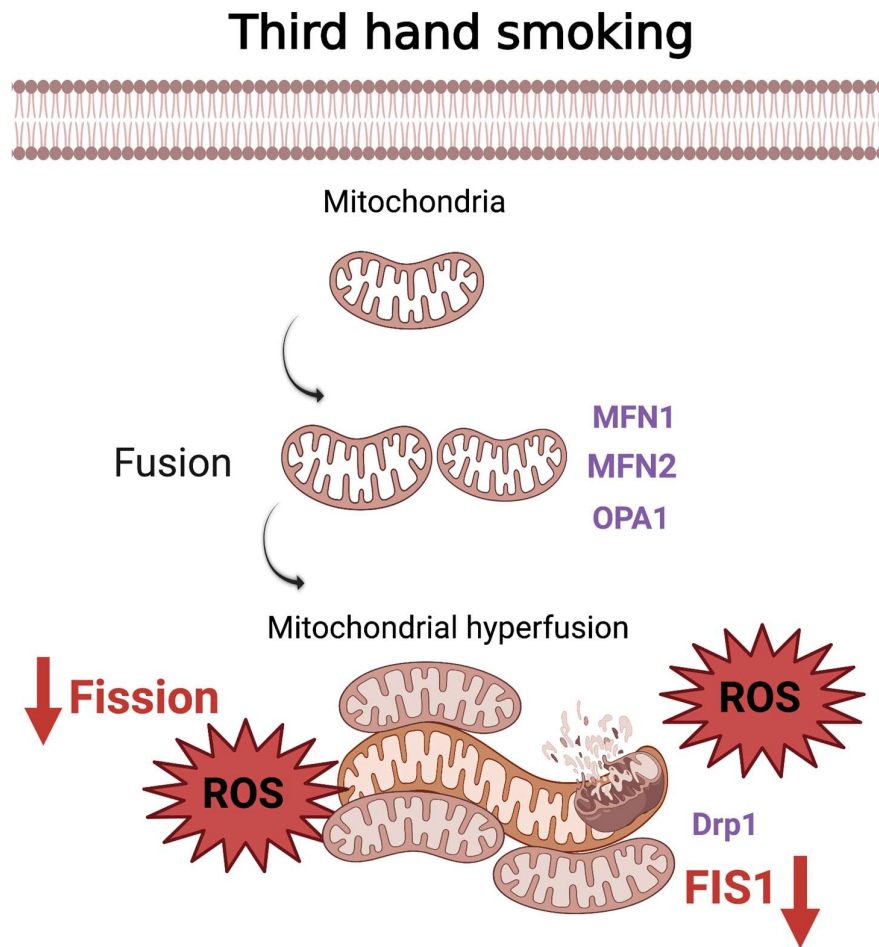


Figure 5. The effect of THS on mitochondria and cell health. THS caused SIMH accompanied by decreased expression of mitochondrial fission protein Fis1 causes the elevation of ROS¹¹⁰.

Pozuelos et al. conducted a randomized control trial to demonstrate how the acute inhalation of THS increased oxidative stress, mitochondrial membrane potential, ATP production, and decreased permeability of transition of mitochondria and mitochondrial membrane. These changes were accompanied by stress-induced mitochondrial hyperfusion and dysfunction and increased DNA repair mechanisms¹¹². Stem cells exposed to THS also showed an increase in SIMH, but upon prolonged exposure, both mitochondrial membrane potential and cell proliferation decreased, ultimately leading to apoptosis of the cell¹¹⁰.

To summarize, cigarette, e-cigarette smoke is a culprit causing a plethora of devastating and fatal diseases. Although tobacco smoking increases the risk for contracting diseases, psychological and social factors play a key role in maintaining the habit¹¹³. With an ever-present concern for this public health crisis, toxins in tobacco smoke have an undeniably detrimental effect on mitochondrial health further aggravating the pathophysiological mechanisms of different diseases. Understanding these mechanisms can be helpful in the development of therapeutics. For example, iPSC-MSCs reduced airway inflammation and offered protection against CS-induced mitochondrial oxidative stress, dysfunction, and apoptosis in human ASMCs and in mouse lungs¹¹⁴.

6. Conclusion

This review highlights how mitochondria damage caused by inhaled intoxicants increases ROS production, apoptosis, reduces respiration, alters mitochondrial membrane potential, and destroys the equilibrium of fission/fusion effects. These detrimental changes contribute to aggravated inflammatory pathways and various disease pathogenesis. Mitochondrial damage responses to smoke vary in a tissue-dependent and concentration-dependent manners, which indicate a need to develop specific studies on understanding the diverse effects and mechanisms which contribute to each unfolding disease process. Understanding these mechanisms can aid in the development of effective interventional and therapeutic modalities.

Furthermore, mitochondrial morphology and health are maintained by the dynamic opposing forces of mitochondrial fusion and fission which are altered by means of various mechanisms involving increased mtROS, increased ATP, dysregulation of key proteins critical, and stress-induced mitochondrial hyperfusion. The intimate connection between mitochondrial morphological changes and dysfunction impairs multiple pathways and alters downstream signaling. Interestingly, these toxic changes vary based on the chemical composition of different e-liquids, therefore further research on the cytotoxicity of aldehyde flavors available for ENDS users is crucial to developing public health guidelines so that specific pathophysiological mechanisms can be elucidated. Although ENDS devices are offered as healthier alternatives to cigarette smoking, it is clear that it is not without risks, especially when concerning maternal health.

Supplementary Materials: Not applicable.

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