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POCONO RECORD

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Nicotine is the primary driver of tobacco addiction in the form of cigarettes, vapes and most other forms of commercial tobacco. The greatest health risks arise when tobacco is burned, which generates thousands of toxic substances.
PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

Movement touts addictive drug as beneficial, but dangers persist

Hasmeena Kathuria
University of Wisconsin-Madison
THE CONVERSATION

An ironic development emerging alongside the “Make America Healthy Again” movement is the portrayal of nicotine as a wellness and performance-enhancing product. Across social media, podcasts, wellness communities and tech startups, prominent wellness personalities and other influencers are portraying nicotine as a misunderstood compound whose potential benefits have been overshadowed by its negative association with cigarette smoking.

As a result, nicotine is being repositioned from an addictive substance linked to tobacco use to a natural product that can be used for everything from improving focus to protecting against cognitive decline. This trend includes use of nicotine alone in noncombustible products such as nicotine pouches, or in combination with caffeine and nootropics, which are substances marketed to enhance cognition.

As a pulmonary physician-scientist who studies nicotine addiction and the health consequences of tobacco and nicotine products, I am concerned about claims that nicotine can enhance wellness, productivity and cognitive performance.

Distinguishing between nicotine and tobacco

Some of these claims stem from the observation that nicotine is a naturally occurring plant compound found primarily in tobacco and in nightshade vegetables such as tomatoes, potatoes and eggplant in trace amounts. Proponents of nicotine use also draw on studies suggesting that nicotine can affect certain aspects of cognition and brain function.

However, extending these findings to broad claims about productivity, brain health, longevity or wellness goes well beyond what has been shown in human studies.

Nicotine is the primary driver of tobacco addiction in the form of cigarettes, vapes and most other



Nicotine, in products such as nicotine pouches, is being repositioned from an addictive substance linked to tobacco use to a natural product that can be used for everything from improving focus to protecting against cognitive decline.

forms of commercial tobacco.

The greatest health risks arise when tobacco is burned, which generates thousands of toxic substances, including carcinogens, carbon monoxide and fine particulate matter. Repeated exposure to these combustion products can cause cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cardiovascular disease and numerous other smoking-related illnesses.

While many smoking-related diseases result from exposure to combustion products, nicotine itself has well-known negative effects on the brain and body. Nicotine activates the sympathetic nervous system – the body’s “fight or flight” response – which increases heart rate and blood pressure and disrupts sleep. Repeated stimulation of this system can place additional strain on the heart.

Nicotine exposure is of particular concern during critical phases of development. Prenatal exposure to nicotine has been associated with adverse effects on fetal growth and development.

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Poll: Most blame Trump for high prices

Howard Schneider, Ann Saphir and Jason Lange
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – Some 78% of Americans blame President Donald Trump’s policies for rising prices that are outpacing their earnings, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll that found majorities of Republicans and Democrats citing the cost of living as their top concern ahead of next month’s midterm elections.

Fifty-seven percent of Trump’s Republicans said that costs have been growing faster than their paychecks, a stark example of how his pursuit of import tariffs, war with Iran and other policies have clashed with a central 2024 campaign promise to kill inflation and lower prices “on day one.”

Inflation instead has increased, to the point where the Federal Reserve has pivoted to rate hikes to quell price increases. Policymakers have attributed to a variety of factors, including rising global energy costs following the start of the Iran war, and the administration’s imposition of aggressive import duties.

Concerns about the economy and the war have driven Trump’s public approval to record lows and have been weighing on support for his party ahead of the Nov. 3 election that will determine control of Congress for the next two years.

About one in four Republicans disapproved of Trump’s handling of the economy, a view shared by 63% of independents and 92% of Democrats. Disapproval was even sharper when it came to inflation, with 68% of all respondents and 40% of Republicans dissatisfied.

Jeffrey Talley, 65, a retired bank examiner from Mission Hills, Kansas, is a registered Republican, who said he voted for Trump in 2016 but not in 2020 or 2024 and now plans to vote for Democrat Adam Hamilton in what has become an unexpectedly competitive Senate race in the state.

“I’m pretty much against all the nonsense that’s going on in the Middle East with the Iran war, and pushing up the price of gasoline ... that’s been very disheartening,” Talley said. He views the election as a chance to elect “somebody to put a check and balance on the craziness that’s going on in the White House.”

The six-day Reuters/Ipsos poll, conducted online and nationwide and completed Oct. 5, gathered responses from 4,506 U.S. adults. It had a margin of error of 2 percentage points for Americans in general and 3 points for Republicans, Democrats and independents.

‘Everything has gone up’

The national average price of a gallon of gasoline was \$4.36 on Oct. 8, compared with \$3.11 a year ago, while diesel fuel prices stood at \$6.28 after a record run-up perhaps felt deepest in farm

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