



Milwaukee Bucks can use the 2026-27 salary cap for roster rebuild

SPORTS, 1B

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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.

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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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Apartment fire above pub forces closure, evacuations

Erik Pfantz
Stevens Point Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK – WISCONSIN

STEVENS POINT – Emergency crews responded about 10 a.m. Oct. 9 to a report of a structure fire at Graffiti’s Sports Pub, 912 Main St. in downtown Stevens Point.

The fire was contained within an hour, building owner Troy Hojnacki told a Stevens Point Journal reporter at the scene. Fire damage was mainly contained to one of two apartment units on the building’s second floor where the fire appears to have originated.

Graffiti’s will be closed for at least the upcoming weekend and likely longer, Hojnacki said. He estimated there was likely tens of thousands of dollars’ worth of water damage to the building to put out the fire.

Crews from Stevens Point Fire Department, Plover Fire Department and Town of Hull Fire Department were first to respond, Brandon Hageman, battalion chief and shift commander on duty for the Stevens Point Fire Department, told a Stevens Point Journal reporter.

Three apartment units across two attached buildings were evacuated of 10 tenants, Hojnacki said.

Two tenants were trapped on a fire escape when first responders arrived and were helped to the ground with a ladder, Hageman said.

One tenant who reported smoke inhalation was treated at the scene by crews and taken to the hospital by an ambulance, Hageman said.

The cause of the fire is under investigation, Hageman said.

Hojnacki said a tenant of the apartment unit where the fire appears to have started reported smelling smoke and finding 4- to 5-foot high flames when they opened the door to another tenant’s room in the same unit. The tenant attempted to use a fire extinguisher to put out the fire but was unsuccessful. The tenant then went to alert their neighbors and help them evacuate the building, Hojnacki said.

Stevens Point Police Department, Plover Police Department, Amherst Fire District, Town of Stockton Fire Department, Town of Rudolph Fire Department, Portage County Emergency Medical Services and Wisconsin Public Service also responded to the fire.

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Emergency crews responded Oct. 9 to a report of a structure fire on the second floor at 912 Main Street or Graffiti’s Sports Pub. ERIK PFANTZ/STEVENS POINT JOURNAL

