Understanding the Rules for Nicotine Salts and Disposable Vapes in the UK

When you first start looking into vaping, the range of choices can feel overwhelming. Two of the most popular categories are nicotine salts and disposable vapes. Both offer a convenient way to enjoy nicotine, but they are covered by different sets of regulations in the UK. Knowing how the rules differ can help you choose the option that suits your habits and preferences.

Nicotine salts are a type of e-liquid that allows for a smoother throat hit at higher nicotine strengths. They are typically sold in 10ml bottles and are designed for use in refillable pod systems or low-wattage devices. Disposable vapes, on the other hand, are single-use devices that come pre-filled with e-liquid and a built-in battery. They are ready to use straight out of the package and are discarded once the liquid runs out or the battery dies.

Nicotine Limits and Bottle Sizes

One of the most straightforward differences in UK vaping rules is the maximum nicotine strength and bottle size. For nicotine salts sold as e-liquid, the legal limit is 20mg/ml (2%). This is the same for all nicotine-containing e-liquids sold in the UK under the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations (TRPR). Additionally, any nicotine e-liquid must be sold in a bottle no larger than 10ml. This means that if you buy a bottle of nicotine salts, it will always be a 10ml bottle with a maximum strength of 20mg.

Disposable vapes, however, are not sold as bottles of liquid. They are classed as a finished product. The same nicotine limit of 20mg/ml applies, but the device itself contains a set volume of e-liquid, usually between 1.5ml and 2ml. Because the liquid is sealed inside, the 10ml bottle rule does not directly apply to the device. Instead, the regulations focus on the total nicotine content per device. This is why you will find disposables offering a similar nicotine experience to a bottle of nicotine salts, but in a portable, all-in-one form.



Product Notifications and Compliance

Every nicotine-containing product sold in the UK must be registered with the MHRA (Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency) through a product notification. This applies to both nicotine salt e-liquids and disposable vapes. The notification includes details about the ingredients, nicotine content, and manufacturing process. This system ensures that all products on the market meet safety standards and are traceable.

For nicotine salts, the manufacturer or importer must submit a notification for each individual e-liquid flavour and strength. This can mean hundreds of notifications for a single brand. For disposable vapes, the notification covers the entire device, including the e-liquid inside it. Because the device is a single product, the notification process is slightly simpler, but the same

safety and ingredient checks apply. Both product types must carry a warning label stating that the product contains nicotine and is not suitable for non-smokers. They must also come in child resistant packaging to reduce the risk of accidental ingestion.

Age Restrictions and Advertising Rules

There is no difference in the age restriction for buying nicotine salts or disposable vapes. In the UK, you must be at least 18 years old to purchase any nicotine product, including both types. Retailers are required to verify age through Challenge 25 policies, and online sales must have robust age verification systems.

Advertising rules are also the same for both. The UK has strict regulations on how nicotine products can be marketed. Advertisements cannot target under-18s, cannot make health claims, and cannot promote nicotine as a safe substance. This applies to in-store displays, online ads, and social media promotions. The rules aim to prevent youth vaping while allowing adult smokers to access safer alternatives. When you see an advert for a disposable vape or a nicotine salt bottle, it must include a health warning and cannot use imagery that appeals to children.

Consumer Safety Considerations

Consumer safety is a key focus of UK vaping rules. For nicotine salts, the 10ml bottle rule and child resistant packaging are designed to prevent accidental overuse and keep the liquid away from children. The warning label is mandatory and must be clearly visible. With disposable vapes, the sealed design means there is no risk of spilling e-liquid, but the device itself must be disposed of responsibly. Many disposable vapes contain lithium batteries and electronic components, so they should be recycled at designated collection points.

Another safety aspect is the nicotine strength. Because nicotine salts are available at 20mg, they deliver a higher concentration of nicotine per puff compared to freebase nicotine e-liquids, which are often available at lower strengths. This can be useful for heavy smokers looking to quit, but it also means that users need to be mindful of their consumption. Disposable vapes also typically use nicotine salts at 20mg, so the same caution applies. The key is to choose a product that matches your nicotine needs and usage pattern.



When to Choose Nicotine Salts

Nicotine salts are a good option if you prefer a smoother throat hit at higher strengths. They work well in low-wattage pod systems that are compact and easy to carry. Because the liquid is in a 10ml bottle, you can refill the pod as needed and choose from a wide range of flavours. This gives you more flexibility than a disposable, because you can switch flavours without buying a new device. Nicotine salts are also more cost-effective in the long run, because you only pay for the liquid and the device lasts for weeks or months.

However, they do require a bit of maintenance. You need to refill the pod, charge the battery, and occasionally replace the coil. If you are new to vaping, this might seem like extra effort. But for many vapers, the ability to customise the experience is worth it.

When to Choose Disposable Vapes

Disposable vapes are the simplest option. There is no refilling, no charging, and no coil changes. You just open the package and start vaping. Once the liquid runs out, you dispose of the device. This makes disposables ideal for beginners, for people who want a no-fuss experience, or for those who are trying vaping for the first time. They are also convenient for travel or for occasions when you do not want to carry a bottle and a device.

The downside is that disposables are generally more expensive per ml of liquid compared to buying a bottle of nicotine salts. They also generate more waste, because the entire device is thrown away. For regular users, the cost can add up quickly. And because the nicotine strength is fixed, you cannot adjust it to your preference.

Making the Right Choice

Ultimately, the choice between nicotine salts and disposable vapes comes down to your personal priorities. If you value simplicity and convenience, a disposable vape might be the better start. If you want more control over your nicotine intake and flavour choices, and you are willing to do a little maintenance, then nicotine salts with a refillable pod system could suit you better.

Both options are regulated to protect consumer safety, and both can help adult smokers transition away from cigarettes. The UK rules around age restrictions, product notifications, and warning labels apply equally, so you can be confident that whichever you choose, it meets the same safety standards.



For a broader look at what is available, many vapers find it helpful to read reviews and comparisons. The magazine Vapour offers plain English nic salt reviews and flavour ratings that can guide your decision. Whether you lean towards disposables or refillable systems, understanding the rules will help you vape responsibly and enjoy the experience.

At the end of the day, the best product is the one that keeps you away from smoking. Both nicotine salts and disposable vapes have their place, and the UK regulatory framework ensures they are safe and consistent. By knowing the differences in how they are sold, packaged, and advertised, you can make an informed choice that fits your lifestyle.