Why vapes taste burnt and how to stop it from happening

A dry, harsh, burnt taste from a vape usually means the wick inside the coil is not getting enough e-liquid. The cotton wick becomes dry, and the heating element scorches it instead of vaporising liquid. This can happen with a new coil that was not prepared properly, with an old coil that has reached the end of its life, or when the power setting is too high for the coil's resistance. The good news is that most causes of a burnt hit are easy to avoid once you understand what is going on inside the tank or pod.

What causes a burnt taste

The coil in a vape device contains a metal wire wrapped around or inside a wicking material, usually organic cotton. When you press the fire button, current from the battery flows through the wire, heating it. The heat turns the e-liquid soaked into the wick into vapour. If the wick is dry, the wire gets much hotter than intended, and instead of vapour you get the taste of scorched cotton. That burnt flavour can linger in the coil even after you refill the tank, because the charred material continues to taint the vapour.

Several factors can leave the wick dry. Chain vaping, taking several puffs in quick succession, does not give the wick time to soak up more liquid between hits. A low e-liquid level in the tank or pod means the wicking ports are not submerged. A coil that is simply worn out after days or weeks of use will also wick more slowly and may develop hot spots. And a device with a variable wattage or voltage setting can easily overpower a coil if the power is turned up beyond the coil's recommended range.

Priming a new coil the right way

The most common cause of a burnt taste is a new coil that was installed without proper priming. A dry coil straight from the packet has no liquid in the cotton. Filling the tank and vaping immediately will almost certainly burn the wick before it has had a chance to absorb e-liquid. Priming simply means saturating the wick before you fire the coil.

Exotic Drinks



To prime a coil, put a few drops of e-liquid directly onto the exposed cotton of the wicking ports and also a drop down the centre of the coil where the wire sits. Let the coil sit in a full tank for at least five to ten minutes before you take the first puff. Some thick high-VG e-liquids need longer to soak in, so waiting fifteen minutes is safer. After that, start at a low wattage, well below the coil’s recommended range, and take a few gentle puffs without pressing the fire button to draw liquid into the wick. Then gradually raise the power to your preferred level. This slow start gives the wick time to fully saturate and avoids the initial dry burn that can ruin a coil in seconds.

Power settings and coil compatibility

Every coil has a recommended wattage or voltage range printed on the coil body or listed in the device manual. Staying within that range is the single most important habit for avoiding burnt hits. Running a coil above its recommended wattage heats the wire faster than the wick can replenish liquid, leading to a dry scorch after just a few puffs. Running it far below the recommended range can also cause problems, the e-liquid may not vapourise properly and can boil rather than aerosolise, which can flood the coil and cause gurgling or spitback, but that is a different issue from a burnt taste.

If you use a box mod or a variable-wattage device, check the resistance of your coil, it is usually shown on the display or marked on the coil itself, and set the power according to the coil's specifications. Many modern mods have a "smart" mode that detects the coil and limits the wattage automatically, but it is still wise to confirm the setting manually. Devices with fixed power, such as most closed pod systems, are designed to work with their own coils, so burnt hits in those cases usually come from other causes like chain vaping or an empty tank.

E-liquid viscosity and wicking speed

The thickness of your e-liquid affects how quickly the wick can absorb it. E-liquids with a high percentage of vegetable glycerin (VG) are thicker than those with more propylene glycol (PG). High-VG liquids produce bigger clouds but move through cotton more slowly. If you use a thick high-VG liquid in a small coil with tiny wicking ports, the wick may not be able to keep up with your puffing pace, and the coil will run dry. Choosing a thinner liquid, or one with a balanced VG/PG ratio like 50/50, can help in devices with smaller coils and limited wicking. For sub-ohm tanks that run at higher power, high-VG liquids are standard, but the wicking ports on those coils are larger to compensate. Matching the liquid to the coil design is part of preventing the burnt taste.



When to replace a coil

Coils do not last forever. Over time the wire accumulates gunk from sweeteners and colourings in the e-liquid, and the cotton loses its ability to wick efficiently. A coil that has been in use for a week or two may start to taste dull or slightly off before it turns burnt. Many vapers learn to recognise the fading flavour as a sign that the coil is nearing the end of its life. If you notice that the vapour tastes weaker, or that you need to take longer draws to get the same hit, it is often time to install a fresh coil. Waiting until the taste turns harsh means the old coil has already charred, and the burnt residue can be difficult to clean from the tank or pod. At SmokeToki you will find a range of replacement coils and pods for different devices, so you can keep your vape tasting clean without guesswork.

Battery performance and its effect on vapour quality

Vape batteries play a bigger role in flavour than many people realise. A battery that is running low on charge may not deliver consistent power to the coil. Instead of a steady current, the device may pulse or drop voltage mid-puff, which can cause the coil to heat unevenly. That uneven heating can create hot spots on the wire while other parts of the wick stay cool, leading to a partial dry burn. This is why a vape that tastes fine on a fresh battery can start tasting burnt when the battery indicator shows one bar left. Keeping your batteries charged and replacing them when they no longer hold a full charge helps maintain consistent power and protects your coils from premature scorching. Battery safety also matters: use the correct charger for your battery type, and never leave charging batteries unattended.

Device maintenance and cleaning

Residue from old e-liquid can build up inside the tank, in the airflow channels, and on the 510 connection that links the tank to the battery. This residue can trap heat and alter the way the coil performs. A simple rinse of the tank with warm water, followed by a thorough dry, can remove old liquid that might be adding a stale or slightly burnt note to fresh e-liquid. The 510 connection should be wiped clean with a dry cloth to ensure good electrical contact. If the connection is dirty, the device may read the coil resistance incorrectly and deliver the wrong amount of power, which can cause overheating. Regular cleaning, every time you change coils or switch flavours, keeps the whole system working as intended and reduces the risk of a burnt hit.

Recognising a burnt coil before you vape

If you fill a tank with a fresh coil and the first puff tastes burnt, the coil was likely not primed enough or you started at too high a wattage. If you have been using the same coil for a while and the taste turns harsh, the coil is spent. Some vapers try to revive a burnt coil by soaking it in e-liquid or rinsing it with water, but the charred cotton will still taint the vapour. Replacing the coil is the only reliable fix. Smell the vapour from the airflow slots before you inhale, if it smells like singed cotton, do not vape it. Empty the tank, install a fresh coil, and prime it properly.

Exotic Candy



By choosing the right coil for your device and e-liquid, keeping your battery in good condition, and replacing coils before they burn out, you can avoid the burnt taste almost entirely. A little attention to how you vape and how you maintain your gear makes the experience far more enjoyable.