



# Sweet e-cigarettes as tasty as sweet food

**PhD candidate Ina Hellmich studies what flavours do to our perception of nicotine products and whether that can be compared to how taste works in food. She recently published some new results. ‘There are no e-cigarettes with cheese flavour, yet we enjoy the taste of cheese.’**

Tobacco producers are always finding new ways of getting people to use their products. Researchers then show the harmful effect of the new product and the government introduces rules targeting it. PhD candidate Ina Hellmich (Sensory Science & Eating Behaviour and the National Institute for Public Health): ‘By taking this approach, we are constantly on the back foot.’ Hellmich and her colleagues exposed test subjects to images of food products and e-cigarettes with a sweet or savoury taste. They did this by putting

**‘We saw no difference between smokers and non-smokers in how tasty they found the e-cigarettes’**

the participants in an fMRI scanner and showing them pictures of vapes or food while giving them sweet or

savoury odours via a tube to the nose. Then they asked the participants for example how tasty they thought a savoury e-cigarette looked like and whether they would want to consume it. In the analysis of the results, the researchers distinguished between smokers and non-smokers.

## **Not transferrable**

‘The most shocking result I felt was that we didn’t find any difference between smokers and non-smokers in how tasty they thought the e-cigarettes were. Non-smokers wanted them just as much as smokers.’ Another result was that all the participants thought the sweet e-cigarettes seemed as tasty as sweet food. ‘Humans are biologically programmed to like sweet things. But no one wanted savoury e-cigarettes, even though both groups did like the taste of savoury food. This shows that we can’t transfer what we know about the sensory perception of food to the sensory perception of vaping.’ DV