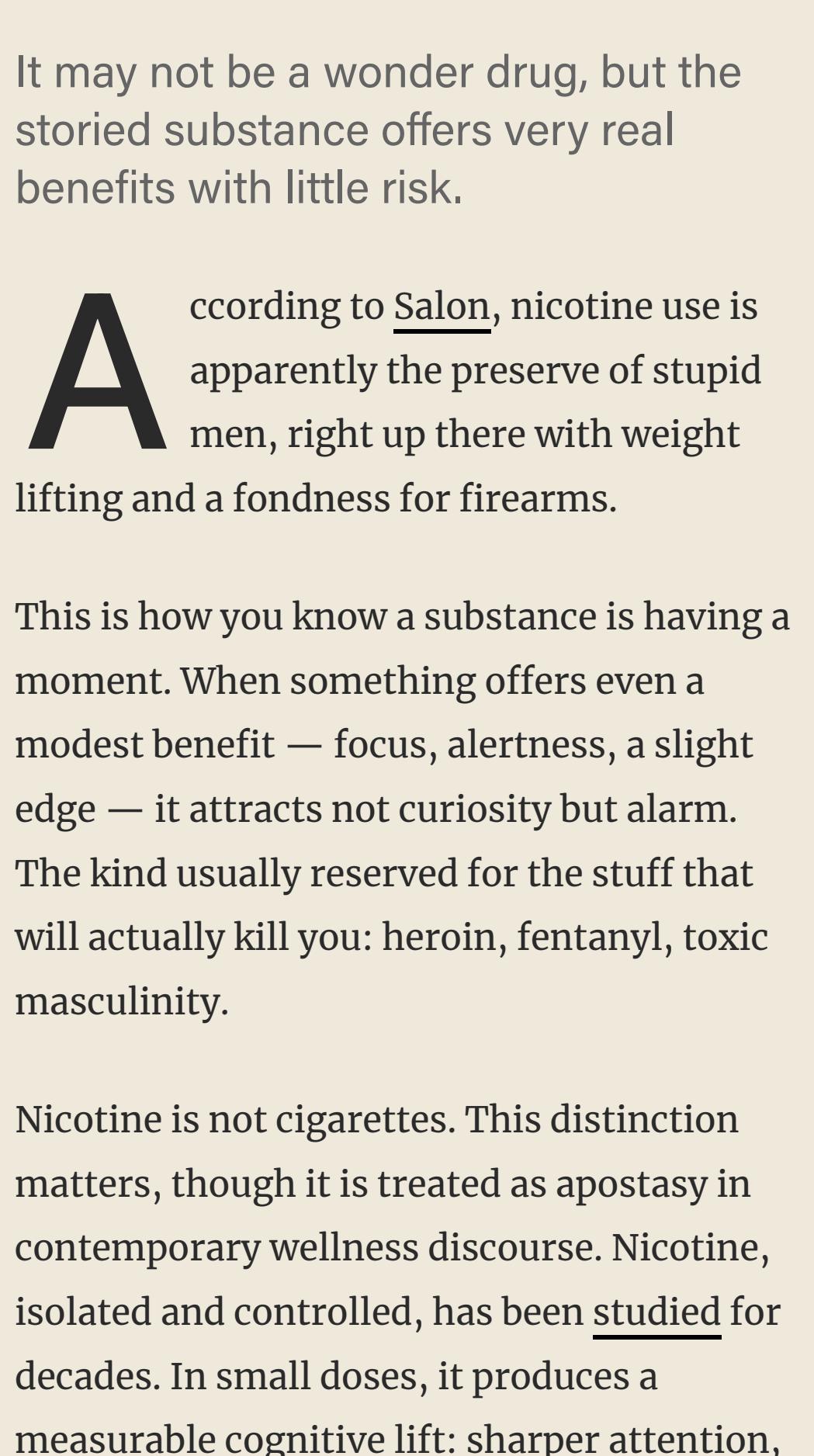


# Align

Lifestyle by Blaze Media

MEN WOMEN NEWSLETTER



Gareth Cattermole/Getty Images

## CULTURE

### WARNING: Nicotine may cause focus, motivation, and joie de vivre (which is why they hate it)

JOHN MAC GHIONN

JANUARY 18, 2026

It may not be a wonder drug, but the storied substance offers very real benefits with little risk.

According to Salon, nicotine use is apparently the preserve of stupid men, right up there with weight lifting and a fondness for firearms.

This is how you know a substance is having a moment. When something offers even a modest benefit — focus, alertness, a slight edge — it attracts not curiosity but alarm. The kind usually reserved for the stuff that will actually kill you: heroin, fentanyl, toxic masculinity.

Nicotine is not cigarettes. This distinction matters, though it is treated as apostasy in contemporary wellness discourse. Nicotine, isolated and controlled, has been studied for decades. In small doses, it produces a measurable cognitive lift: sharper attention, faster reaction time, improved working memory.

That isn't influencer folklore. Far from it. It's why exhausted academics used it to push through marking and deadlines, why surgeons relied on it during long overnight shifts, and why soldiers carried it in environments where fatigue killed faster than bullets — long before Salon's feeble attempt to dismiss it as a "scam."

I use Zyn regularly. It helps me concentrate. That's the entire story. I don't feel enlightened. I don't feel transformed. I don't feel the urge to start a movement. And, crucially, I don't feel compelled to use the product in any anatomically creative fashion.

## RELATED CONTENT

Tucker Carlson, a former Zyn user turned rival nicotine entrepreneur, recently aimed a jab at his old brand, joking that its devotees have abandoned the instructions altogether in favor of a more southern route of administration.

I can't speak for others. I can only report that I place the pouch exactly where the instructions suggest, write my sentences, and get on with my day. If a shadow subculture of rogue pouch experimentation exists, it has somehow escaped my notice.

Backside-bracing humor aside, the Salon piece really zeroes in on Carlson, quoting him at length and treating his remarks with a gravity usually reserved for Senate hearings.

Carlson has described nicotine as "super important," arguing that the country has grown sadder and less healthy since it was discouraged and that its return coincides with people seeming, on balance, happier — though it is not entirely clear which people he has been interacting with, given that most Americans currently look one minor inconvenience away from spontaneous combustion.

He has also referred to it — again, with comic exaggeration — as a "life-enhancing, God-given chemical" that can make you "feel better than you've ever felt."

The language is clearly playful, designed to provoke rather than persuade. But exaggeration doesn't automatically mean error. Mild stimulation can brighten mood and restore alertness, particularly in a culture permanently exhausted by poor sleep and low-grade stress.

In a culture serious about public health, nicotine would barely rate a mention. We'd be too busy going after the sugar cartels poisoning the body politic with obesity and diabetes or the doctors throwing drugs at problems better addressed in the confession booth.

Instead, nicotine is singled out not because it is uniquely hazardous, but because it violates the aesthetic rules of modern wellness as defined by smug, affluent, urban commentators who have never missed a meal or a night's sleep. To them, nicotine belongs to the wrong people — MAGA rubes, rednecks, bumpkins — rather than credentialed strivers in co-working spaces.

Nicotine stimulates rather than soothes. It activates rather than dulls. It may even nudge testosterone upward, however modestly. And for that social transgression alone, it is treated not as imperfect, but as suspect.

Well, it's time to push back. Think of nicotine as coffee's scruffier cousin. Coffee is embraced because it has been ritualized, monetized, and moralized into submission — latte art, loyalty cards, sanctioned dependence. Nicotine, by contrast, still carries the faint scent of agency. It has not been fully tamed, branded, or absolved by consensus. You use it because you want to function better, not because it comes with a yoga mat and a manifesto.

The real scandal is not that influencers exaggerate nicotine's benefits. Influencers exaggerate everything. They once convinced millions that celery juice could heal trauma. The scandal is that nicotine provokes panic precisely because it works, within limits, for some people.

It requires no subscription or expert guidance. It is relatively cheap, widely available, and stubbornly unimpressed by credentialled gatekeepers. That alone makes it dangerous in a wellness economy built on scarcity, jargon, and endless scams. A substance that delivers a small, practical benefit without demanding anything in return beyond a few dollars isn't easily controlled — and so it must be pathologized rather than tolerated.

None of this requires indulging the more unhinged claims now circulating online. Nicotine doesn't cure herpes. It doesn't raise IQ. It can't turn a fat, lazy slob into a Navy SEAL. Anyone selling it as a miracle deserves mockery.

But pretending nicotine is uniquely dangerous while applauding sugar binges, sugar手and donut-like brain nits, and total screen immersion is selective hysteria. It's moral panic dressed up as concern, aimed squarely at the wrong target.

Nicotine is not a lifestyle. It is not an identity, but a tool. Used deliberately, occasionally, it can help certain people think more clearly for a short stretch of time. That is all. The insistence on treating it as either a demonic poison or a sacred molecule is the same mistake from opposite ends of the spectrum.

Let the haters hate. I, like Carlson, will continue to use nicotine. I'll stick with Zyn, use it occasionally and — this seems important to clarify — this seems to administer it exactly as instructed.

74 Comments

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in the American Conservative, the New York Post, the South China Morning Post, and the Sydney Morning Herald.

@ghlionn →

John Mac Ghlionn

CONTRIBUTOR

John Mac Ghlionn is a researcher and essayist. His work has appeared in