

PIPES ARE MORE THAN

Pipe Dreams



by Mark Mathew Braunstein

HOW TO MAXIMIZE THE BENEFITS AND REDUCE THE RISKS OF PIPES

Smoking pipes have been unearthed in archaeological digs throughout the world. The earliest were sculpted from stone six millennia ago during the late Stone Age. In our present Stoned Age, traditionalists who smoke cannabis in pipes can take comfort in knowing that they are reenacting ancient rituals first practiced by our prehistoric ancestors. Yet the time has come to revolutionize this ritual for the 21st century.

Put This in Your Pipe and Smoke It

Smoking a pipe can provide several advantages over smoking a joint. The act of smoking a pipe can be less hurrying, less wasteful, less toxic, and less irritating.

Less Hurrying: Different herbs combust at differing rates. Pipe tobacco is treated chemically to stay lit, while untreated cannabis tends to snuff out between tokes. This lets you let your mind wander leisurely and daydream some pipedreams.

Less Wasteful: Once you light up a joint, you tend to stop only once you've smoke it down to a roach. Between tokes, the joint continues burning, wasting that sidestream smoke. You can cap the bowl between puffs with a pipe to conserve your precious cannabis. This holds especially true when your smoking session is solo rather than social.

A pipe transfers 40 to 50 percent of the cannabinoids in cannabis, but a joint only 10 to 20 percent.¹ Measured in THC alone, a joint loses up to half to a side stream.² Smoke one pipeful, and get one free. Expressed as an automotive metaphor, you need two fill-ups to drive to Nirvana in a joint, while in a pipe, you need only one. Your mileage may vary.

Less Toxic: Pipes spare your lungs from the extra smoke from rolling papers. That added smoke might be warranted if the papers were medicinal or psychoactive, but even papers from hemp contribute no relief or high. Still, the load is less toxic if you avoid repeatedly inhaling fumes from matches or butane lighters. Caution is effectively exercised with flameless lighters, called USB or electronic lighters. (See Issue 159 of Weed World for "Safer Ways to Tune Up Your Cannabis Ignition System.")

Less Irritating: Pipes provide another respiratory benefit that joints may lack. Smoke is hot and dry and parches your throat and mouth, leading to gum disease³ and tooth decay⁴. By absorbing the heat, a pipe's stem cools down the smoke before you take a hit.⁵



The Tunnel at the End of the Light

A pipe's stem is the tunnel at the end of the light. Stems are made of wood, stone, silicone, acrylic, ceramic, metal, or glass. Pipes made of borosilicate glass are less prone than other glass to crack when heated, though still prone to shatter if dropped. Cuts from glass shards are not conducive to good health. When short, non-wooden stems can get too hot to handle and burn your fingertips and lips. Numerous studies have proven that burns are not conducive to good health.

The longer the stem, the cooler the smoke. Accustomed to feeling the heat in their raspy throats from smoking joints or short-stem pipes, first-time smokers of long-stem pipes don't feel that heat, so they fill their lungs to the point of bursting and exploding into a coughing fit. Be kind to your lungs by lengthening that stem.

Health tip: The longer the stem, the cooler the smoke.

Divide and Conquer

A British name for a long-stemmed pipe is the "churchwarden pipe." Popularized by the Hobbit book and film trilogy, they have been nicknamed "Hobbit pipes." Unfortunately, these are rarely marketed and segmented for easy cleaning and convenient storage. You can piece together long stems

from several metal stems sold at smoke shops. But metal imparts a tinny aftertaste to the smoke. Wood, a natural fiber, is lightweight and imparts a pleasant aroma or none at all. Despite a multitude of pipes in the marketplace, segmented long-stemmed wooden pipes are rarities. Seek, and ye shall find.

If you and your friends gather to pass a peace pipe, the honorable notion of sharing should be indulged with caution. Unlike the single-use butt end of a joint, the mouthpiece of a pipe is more durable and can last a lifetime. Yet, it could also shorten your life. Prudence calls upon you to sanitize the mouthpiece with an antiseptic wipe before passing the peace pipe. You will also be sharing your bacteria and viruses that can transmit a host of contagious respiratory diseases.



Alternatively, you can distribute the segments of your long-stemmed pipe among your friends. Each segment can then serve as a personal mouthpiece. As you pass around the bowl, each person can insert their personal segment into the communal bowl, much like octopus-like hookahs with one single bowl but several tubular stems.

Health tip: When sharing with friends, sanitize or exchange the mouthpiece for each participant.

Life is a Bowl of Cherries and Cherrywood

While wood is ideal for stems, it initially poses a problem for use as bowls. Brand-new wooden bowls do burn ever so

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slightly. Wood thus requires an initiation in which an empty bowl is puffed upon but not inhaled. Because where there's fire, there's smoke.

Once initiated, WOODEN BOWLS made of hardwood will not scorch again because they require higher temperatures to ignite than the cannabis flower. Wooden bowls are usually carved from native hardwoods. That could be oak, maple, beech, walnut, or cherrywood in North America. Briarwood native to Europe and Africa is the most heat-resistant of all hardwoods worldwide.

CORNCOB PIPES tend to ignite too easily. The outer shell sometimes varnished with shellac, is especially flammable around the rim. The most hazardous are the miniature pipes intended to be thrown away after one use. Throw them away before use.

METAL BOWLS, even when too hot to handle, remain non-flammable. Smoke shops sell them piecemeal, the same as metal stems, so metal bowls you can accessorize them onto wooden stems.

CERAMIC, STONE, and TURKISH MEERSCHAUM are among the coolest and safest bowls.

SOAPSTONE and SANDSTONE PIPES consist of bowls and stems sculpted in one small piece, but their stems can be too short for safe use.

GLASS PIPES also have bowls and stems made of one piece, but if their stems are too short, their bowls are too hot to handle. Small glass pipes do provide one redeemable feature. Rather than ignite the cannabis through the top of the bowl, you can heat the underside of the bowl. In the drug underworld, these are called crackpipes. By heating the cannabis rather than burning it, you have effectively created a primitive but pocket size vaporizer for cannabis.

FLAT-BOTTOMED BOWLS are features of most metal pipes that other materials may lack. It's puzzling and annoying that many pipes marketed for smoking cannabis have rounded bottoms.



You cannot place round-bottomed pipes steadily upon a table with confidence that the pipe will not flop over and spill its precious contents.



DIY: Consider constructing a hybrid of a long but segmented wooden stem that ends at a small stone or ceramic bowl. Heads up, head shops! Are you listening?

"In a pinch, you can always improvise a one-piece pipe. A perennial favorite is the legendary apple of the Garden of Eden."

The Apple of My Eye

In a pinch, you can always improvise a one-piece pipe. A perennial favorite is the legendary apple of the Garden of Eden. The apple even adds a fruity flavor as you draw on it. Be sure to select an apple with a level bottom.

DIY: Starting at the top, carve out an eyelet at the stem and continue down halfway into the core. Next, hollow out a second eyelet from the side, also halfway into the core. The two tunnels should meet, forming an L-shape. Insert a screen at the top is your bowl. When you're done smoking, remove the screen, and eat

the rest of the apple, replenishing moisture to your parched mouth and throat. As smoking depletes the human body of Vitamin C6, eating an apple will compensate for your loss of vitamin C, though not as much when you compare apples with oranges.

Screening for Drugs

The bowls of pipes intended for tobacco often are larger than those needed for cannabis. Even small bowls require screens to block both bits of bud and specks of ash from reaching your mouth. To reduce the depth of the chamber, you can insert a screen.

Do not resort to makeshift screens of aluminum foil punctured with pinholes. After just one use, the foil corrodes. After a second use, it crumbles and disintegrates as though into thin air. Where did it go? Into the smoke and your lungs.

Instead, purchase from smoke shops coin-shaped screens made from durable metals of brass or steel in various diameters. Some pipe screens are coated with a thin layer of plastic or wax to ensure a grip on the punch press

that cuts the circles out of the metal mesh sheet. Stay safe by burning off that coating before inserting the screen into the pipe. Holding it with tweezers, toast the screen in a lighter, match, or candle flame.

If someone asks why you are toasting your screen, just answer that you are screening for drugs.



Good Clean Fun

To keep your pipeline flowing, replace that screen regularly. When you replace the screen, clean the gunk from the rest of the pipe. Stems and bowls are tar traps, which is a good thing. If your pipe's airflow becomes clogged, you've waited too long before cleaning. After each smoking session, remove the pipe to expel any loose ash or bud by blowing it into each chamber. Also, peek into each segment to ensure you can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

To clean out stems, your ideal drug paraphernalia are, no surprise, pipe cleaners. The standard length is 15 cm (six inches). Pipe cleaners for long stems come twice that length at 30 cm (one foot). Also, bamboo skewers marketed as cooking tools can be helpful for cleaning.

To scrap out bowls, sandwich picks, blunt-tipped knives, or pointed utility blades are handy. Avoid soiling your hands with toxic tar by wearing vinyl or nitrile exam gloves. When donning gloves, remember that two lefts do not make a right.

Cleanup can be a struggle but find joy in knowing that any gooey tar you've removed is better on the tools in front of you than inside of you.

Ashes to Ashes, Smoke to Smoke

One last health tip concerns the previous step in the smoking process.

Refrain from smoking a bowlful down to just ash. Otherwise, you risk inhaling lots of ash with the smoke on your final toke. Dump that ash into an ashtray, not into your lungs.

Mark Mathew Braunstein is the author of six books, including *Mindful Marijuana Smoking: Health Tips for Cannabis Smokers* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2022), from which this article was adapted. You can read his many editorials and articles about medical marijuana and recreational cannabis at

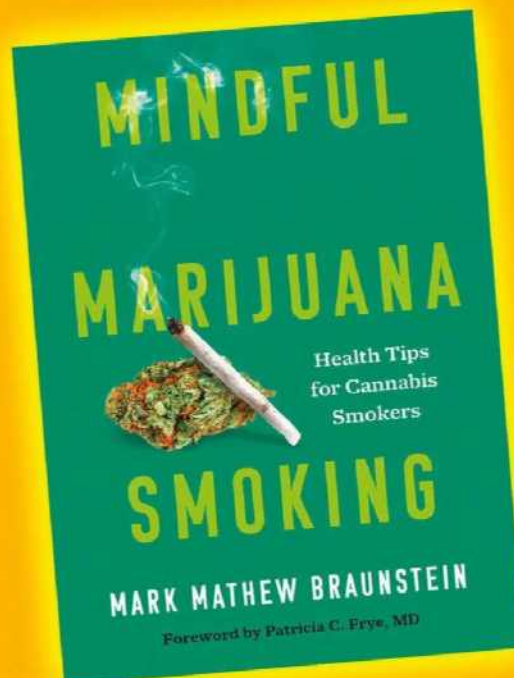
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"Whenever you do replace the screen, also clean out the gunk from the rest of the pipe. Stems and bowls are tar traps, which is a good thing."

Notes

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