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Pass That Joint?

Maybe Pass
On That Joint

by Mark Mathew Braunstein

Let's Get Rolling

Crumble some cannabis buds, spread them onto a thin sheet of paper, shape that sheet into a cylinder, and then seal it. You've now rolled yourself a joint. Simple and small, the joint is traditional, portable, concealable, disposable, shareable, and yes, smokable. Once you've mastered the applied science and fine art of rolling joints, you can claim your cred as a cannabis connoisseur.

The joint is hailed as the cannabis classic, yet nowadays only half of all cannabis users smoke joints. The rest of us have migrated to hand pipes, water pipes, vaporizers, and edibles. Pass that joint? The time may have come to pass on that joint.

Cutting Corners in Your Use of Rolling Papers

If you have a pack of rolling papers handy, hold it in your hand. Do you really want to hold that in your lungs? Without enhancing any high or relief, paper adds toxic fumes. You would not stuff a sheet into your pipe to smoke just paper, so try to reduce the paper in your joints.

One way to cut corners in your use of rolling papers is to cut its corners. When you begin to roll, the closer edge that faces you need not be as wide as the far edge with the adhesive. So trim the two corners where you start rolling. Another way to reduce your use is to perfect your rolling skills so you require only one sheet not two, or need only thin paper not thick.

Through Thick and Thin

Rolling papers are made from a variety of fibers. The most common is wood pulp, which is so versatile that Weed World is printed on it. If a brand of rolling paper refrains from advertising its ingredients, it's likely wood pulp. Other traditional fibers include rice straw, wheat straw, sisal, esparto, and flax, also called linseed. Placed side by side, some papers feel thick, others thin. The thinnest are rice papers. Surely alluding to condoms, some boast "ultra-thin." Some papers are bleached, dyed, carbonated, colored, sweetened, or flavored. As food additives, these might be safe to eat, but they are not safe to smoke. Because what's safe to digest in your stomach is not safe to inhale in your lungs.

When bleached, papers retain chlorine residue. When its fumes are inhaled, liquid chlorine bleach is so toxic that one whiff will make your head spin. Other chemicals may be added to make paper lighter, stronger, or longer burning. Often added to standardize the burn rate, potassium nitrate is linked to oral and respiratory irritation and damage. Health tip: Seek rolling papers free of additives. Often these will be from fibers that were organically grown.

Hemp for High Rollers

Among rolling papers, hemp is the hippest and the newest fiber. Tough and thick, hemp makes rolling easier for novices. As its botanical twin, hemp makes sense as the most compatible fiber for smoking cannabis. Nevertheless, derived from the stalk, hemp adds no medicinal or psychoactive effects.

Rolling papers both hold the cannabis and hold back its combustion. Those for tobacco are classified into slow burning and free burning. Slow burners snuff out if not

puffed on constantly. Free burners, once lit, continue to burn without requiring a lot of huffing and puffing. Tobacco is itself chemically treated to burn continuously and freely. Compared to tobacco, cannabis burns slowly. Thus, when not puffed on constantly, cannabis in slow-burning paper readily snuffs out.

Hemp papers are slow burners. When first introduced commercially, they so readily snuffed out that they garnered a bad reputation. Now made thinner, they burn more readily. Most papers that claim the moral high ground for being organically grown are hemp.

All Mixed Up

Two spinoffs of the joint include the spliff and the blunt. The spliff mixes tobacco into the buzz. The blunt rolls cannabis in tobacco cigar wrappers. When mixing tobacco with cannabis, tobacco smokers typically consume up to twice more cannabis in blunts than in joints. That's a waste of both cannabis wealth and of lung health. Even worse, the joint venture of smoking tobacco together with cannabis increases the risk of developing habits for both. As spliffs and blunts feed two habits with one stone, the joint is by far the safest because it omits the hook of tobacco.

The Joint Effects of Pesticides and Heavy Metals

Regulations setting limits on the use of pesticides on food plants do not apply to fibrous plants grown for textiles. For those, the sky's the limit and the soil's the dumping ground. While the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) sets regulatory standards for additives to tobacco, it sets none for what rolling papers may contain, not even for the small proportion of papers sold directly to consumers for rolling into homemade cigarettes. It is no flight of imagination to conclude that the larger proportion gets rolled into cannabis joints, and the FDA refrains from regulating cannabis. Independent labs do measure the purity of cannabis. Yet the same lab testing is rarely applied to rolling papers. In 2020, in the first survey of its kind, one lab tested 70 different rolling papers that were for sale online and locally in Santa Cruz, California. In tests for heavy metals, 58 brands exceeded the limits allowed by California for cannabis products, most failing for traces of lead. When digested from food or water, lead causes brain damage and neurological disorders. When combusted as smoke, even lead gets transmitted, which is proven to inflict damage to the lungs.

Health Tip: Until rolling papers are regulated the same as foods, be as conscious of the quality of rolling papers as you are of the cannabis that you roll into them. Seek papers that are made from fibers claimed to be organically grown.

The Unfiltered Truth about Filter Tips

Filter tips for tobacco cigarettes are a cruel and deadly hoax. In response to early studies linking lung cancer to smoking, the tobacco industry responded by inventing mere window dressings in the form of filter tips. Filter tips are more profitable for cigarette makers because they cost less than the tobacco they replace.

Filter tips have had as bad a track record as the tobacco

they were supposed to be rendering less harmful. Initially, they were made of cotton that was soaked in lye. Oh joy! Later, filters were made of asbestos. More joy! Nowadays, 98% are made of cellulose acetate, a cheap plastic derivative whose outgassing can cause headaches. Cellulose-acetate filter tips do not reduce the incidence of lung cancer from tobacco smoke. Rather, they only postpone the cancer by five years, mainly because filter-tip cigs contain less tobacco than unfiltered cigs. Smoking less tobacco postpones cancer, but does not prevent it.



a typical cigarette filter. Next roll it into a coil, like wrapping sushi. If it does stay coiled, moisten it or add a dab of nontoxic glue stick. Place the coil into the rolling paper at the mouthpiece end. Add your cannabis and then get rolling.

Some smokers who drool on the mouthpieces of joints can cause them to collapse, thus obstructing the flow of smoke. Coiled smoking tips keep the mouthpieces open. They also reduce waste by preventing raw cannabis

from spilling out the ends and from being trashed as roaches.

While cigarette filters trap some tar and ash, they also trap nicotine. To compensate, most smokers ultimately smoke more. Proven useless by smokers who still die of lung cancer and other respiratory diseases, filter tips provide only a comforting placebo effect, offering smokers the false assurance that they can continue to smoke. Continue to smoke they do, until their last dying breath.

Burning Questions about Filter Tips for Cannabis

Manufacturers promote filter tips for cannabis with the same misleading smoke and mirrors as for tobacco. The former Institute for Cancer Prevention had closely studied the ineffectiveness of filter tips for tobacco. Its researchers offered the opinion that filters would prove just as useless for cannabis because any filter that trapped tar would also filter out cannabinoids. And to compensate for lost cannabinoids trapped by filter tips, we cannabis smokers would end up smoking more, thus cancelling out any slim benefit of filters.

As alternatives to cellulose acetate, filter tips marketed for cannabis are made of cotton, wool, hemp, corn husks, or charcoal. No lab tests have proven that such filter tips do not remove cannabinoids. No regulatory oversight silences the manufacturers' unsubstantiated claims, so anything goes and anything gets said. A filter tip to remove the noxious fumes from cannabis smoke without also removing cannabinoids might be worth waiting for. But while waiting, don't hold your breath.

Health Tip about Filter Tips: Once you've filtered out the manufactures' hype about filter tips, you will understand that none has yet been proven effective for cannabis.

Tips about Smoking Tips

Smoking tips, also called crutches, are available commercially under the misnomer "filter tips." You can make your own. Start with strips of paperboard or thin non-corrugated cardboard used to dispense near-at-hand rolling papers or matchbooks. Trim a piece to the width of

Paper drinking straws cut into small segments provide an alternative to coiled smoking tips. When rolling the joint, you might need to apply a tiny dab of nontoxic glue stick to prevent the straw from slipping out. Cutting longer segments allows you to extend the straw out the rolling paper, making it all the more protective against burns, because an important feature of smoking tips is preventing the lit roach from scorching your lips and fingertips. Burns, after all, are not conducive to good health.

Safety Tips: Smoking tips offer three benefits. They prevent the tip of the joint from collapsing and therefore assure air flow. They reduce waste and therefore save you money. And they add a safe distance between you and the burning embers.

Roach Clips and Cigarette Holders

Roach clips and cigarette holders are extensions of smoking tips. Rather than hold the roach, you hold the clip that holds the roach. While roach clips safeguard against burns on your fingertips, danger still lurks from burns to your lips.

Cigarette holders to the rescue! They provide a safe distance from the joint's burning embers, so smoke will not get in your eyes or permeate your hair and clothing. Yet, as long and slender tubes, holders are so similar to pipe stems that you might as well skip the rolling paper and instead smoke a pipe.

A New Take on Tokes

When you take on a joint, half of the smoke and therefore half of the cannabinoids are lost to side stream. How then to most efficiently inhale the smoke that does reach your mouth? Long drags or short? Between tokes, long pauses or short?

A study published in 2008 researched how to best keep a joint burning. It found that longer drags delivered more THC into the blood. Similarly, more frequent tokes raised the combustion temperature, which in turn introduced more THC into the blood. So to squeeze your joint for all the THC that it's worth, take long and take often.

Inside of a Small Circle of Friends

The last step in rolling joints is sealing them. Most people lick the gum with their tongues. Be prudent by avoiding sharing bodily fluids with casual acquaintances. If you roll joints and share them with your friends, you might as well be kissing them. Instead, seal joints with cotton swabs moistened with water.

Cannabis is often partaken in communal rituals that can forge bonds among strangers, can deepen bonds among friends, can spread joy throughout the land ... and can spread disease throughout the household. Rather than pass around a joint, practice oral hygiene by giving your friends their own personal joints. Pass around only matches or lighters. If you share a bottle of wine, you may share the bottle, but you do not share the glass. In the same spirit in our post-pandemic society, do not pass that joint.

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

www.MarkBraunstein.org

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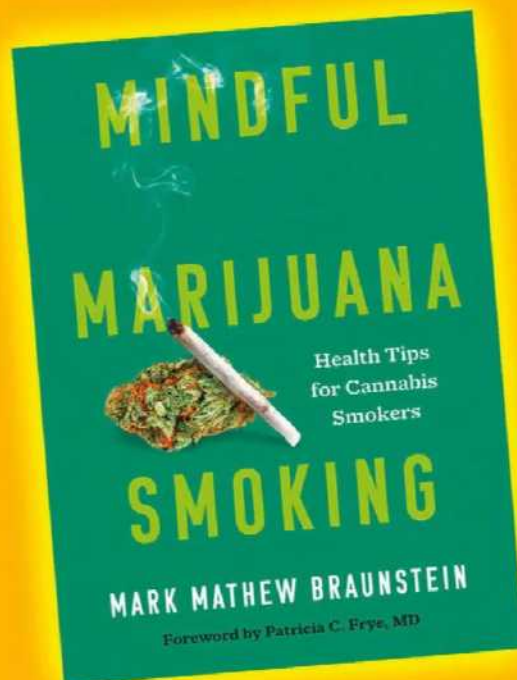
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