

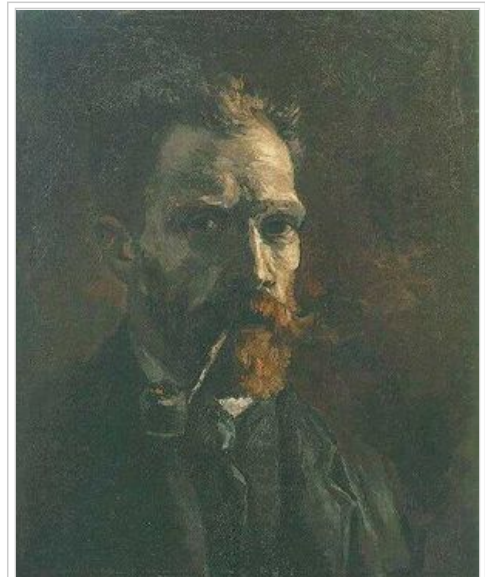
Pipe Packing and Smoking techniques

Da Pipedia.

The information presented here was originally formed from an excellent [Alt.Smokers.Pipes FAQ](#)

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Vincent Van Gogh - Self-portrait with pipe, Oil on canvas, Painted in Paris, in the Spring of 1886

Selecting your first pipe

When selecting your first pipe, the best advice to follow is "Pick one you like." However, given the considerable range of materials, prices and designs, more in-depth guidance follows.

While you're buying the pipe, pick up a package of pipe cleaners (the soft, cotton ones are best for most purposes), and a cheap "pipe tool" or "tamper"; you'll need them.

If you are trying to switch to pipes and give up cigarettes check out this excellent article by Steve Fallon: [Good-Bye Cigarettes, Hello Pipe!](#)

Material

For your first pipe, you'd do well to select one made of briar, the pipe-making material most commonly used due to its durability, heat resistance, and pleasing appearance. Other materials such as clay, meerschaum and porcelain are also used to make pipes, but these materials are fragile and lack the smoking characteristics and ease of use of briar. Corncob pipes are the least expensive option for a first pipe, and they are a viable alternative to briar; however, they often have very small bowls—the part of the pipe that holds the tobacco—and brittle plastic stems that are quite easy to bite through.

Most briar pipes have stems made of vulcanite (rubber) or lucite (acrylic). Either material works fine, and stem material is purely a matter of personal choice. Vulcanite is softer, which many find more comfortable, but lucite is more durable and resists oxidation.

See Also: [Materials and Construction](#) and [What Makes a Good Briar Pipe](#) by R.D. Field

Shape and size

The shape of a pipe is entirely a matter of personal taste. Many pipe smokers prefer pipes that are bent, as they "hang" better, putting less strain on the teeth and jaw. Others prefer straight-stemmed pipes, predominately for aesthetic reasons and that it keeps the smoke out of the eyes, but also because it is easier to insert a pipe cleaner to absorb the condensate that occasionally collects in the shank while smoking. For a detailed study of pipe shapes and pipe anatomy, see [Materials and Construction](#) or the [OoOPS Guide to Identifying Pipes](#) (<http://www.fujipub.com/ooops/pipeshap.html>).



Castello Old Antiquari GG pipe made of **briar wood**, courtesy of [pipes2smoke.com](#)

In terms of size, you'll probably want to avoid very small pipes, as they tend to smoke hot, and very large ones, as they are often harder for a novice to keep lit and may hold too much tobacco to finish comfortably, initially.

Price

Pipes range in price from a couple of dollars to several thousand; it is recommended that you spend a modest amount for your first pipe. By purchasing a moderately-priced pipe, you will not be out a large sum if you determine that pipe smoking isn't for you. Try not to purchase one of those pipes you may find in plastic bubble packaging at your local discount store if you can avoid it; instead, seek out a good tobacconist and ask for his or her recommendation. Not only will this give you a broader selection from which to choose, but the tobacconist is likely to have some good advice on how to get started. Don't be afraid to tell the shop owner that you're a novice. He or she will figure this out pretty quickly on their own anyway, and it is in their own best interest to help you select a pipe and tobacco that they think you'll enjoy. If you don't know where to find a reputable tobacconist, check the Pipes Digest Resource Guide (http://www.pipes.org/resource_guide.html), the ASP Home Page (<http://www.aspipes.org/>) or ask the newsgroup for a recommendation.

Basket pipes

A reasonable quality "basket" pipe (so-called because most tobacconists keep their lower-priced, "no-name" pipes in an open basket near the sales counter) can be had for as little as \$15, and many name-brand manufacturers produce pipes in the \$35-60 range.

Seconds

A true "second" is a pipe that has some kind of flaw (which is almost always cosmetic in nature) and is therefore not deemed worthy to carry the manufacturer's usual brand name. Typically, such pipes are simply stamped "Imported Briar" or something similar; however, some manufacturers have distinctive stampings for their cosmetically-challenged pipes (such as Peterson's "Irish Seconds"). You can find some very good pipes at a reduced price because they have surface flaws—pits, putty "fills" in the briar, imperfect carving, etc.—that do not affect the way they smoke at all. Many of the inexpensive pipes that you will find at your tobacconist (to include "basket" pipes and most "house brands") are "seconds" of one sort or another.

Estate pipes

In the pipe smoking community, "estate" is a euphemism for "used." By buying an estate pipe, it is possible to get a high quality pipe for much less than it would cost new. (It is also possible to buy a piece of junk at a greatly inflated price, so *caveat emptor* applies.) While these pipes are usually thoroughly cleaned before they are sold, some people are appalled at the idea of smoking a pipe that was smoked by someone else. It should be noted that the previous owner's smoking habits will have at least a minor affect on the taste the pipe will impart to tobacco.

Filters

You should not be inhaling smoke when enjoying your pipe, so a filter is, in the opinion of many, superfluous. One major drawback to most filtering systems is that they tend to affect the taste of the tobacco—for the worse—if not kept meticulously clean. With that said, in some parts of the world, particularly Central Europe, pipe filters are quite common. Many of the pipes sold there have a cavity in the shank—that part of the pipe that connects the bowl to the stem—designed to accommodate 9mm filters. There is absolutely nothing wrong with using a filter in your pipe. If you prefer filters, then by all means use them. Nevertheless, you don't need them.

Selecting your first tobacco

As with selecting your first pipe, "Pick one you like". If you have had experience with only cigarettes and cigars, you're in for a real treat. The variety of pipe tobaccos is positively staggering, and the flavor of a blend is influenced not only by its component tobaccos, but also by myriad other factors such as the style of cut and the pipe used to smoke it. The only way to determine which sort of tobacco is right for you is to try a number of very different blends to decide which general type you like, and then proceed from there. Some of us are constantly searching for the perfect blend, affectionately known as "The Holy Grail."

Varieties

"Drugstore" Tobaccos

Generally, you will be better off purchasing your tobacco from a tobacconist. Many of the commonly available blends found in discount stores or supermarkets are made from lower-quality tobacco, and the additives with which they are laced for preservation and "taste enhancement" alter the way the tobacco smokes, usually for the worse. Some additives have negative effects on the smoking qualities, causing tongue bite, and can even taint, "ghost", or otherwise sour a pipe for subsequent bowls. Of course, there is no harm in sampling these tobaccos; you may even discover that one such blend is just your cup of tea. Many "drugstore blends" have been around for decades, so they must have something going for them. Simply note it would be wise to avoid sampling suspect tobaccos in one's better pipes, and not to judge your overall pipe smoking experience on them alone.

If you live in an area where there are no tobacconists, you can always shop online, or you might try the drugstore-supermarket brands, Captain Black (Americas no. 1 selling pipe tobacco) which is very mild, and flavorful, or Borkum Riff, a bit hotter and wetter smoking. Granted, they may not satisfy the connoisseur's refined tastes. They are tobacco for the masses, but they aren't too bad. The large tins are usually fresh. The small pouches may not be.

Faux Pipe Tobaccos (a relative term)

This is a new variety of "pipe" tobacco which has emerged recently (2009) in America, and possibly other countries. It is actually roll-your-own cigarette tobacco, which is being marketed as Premium Pipe Tobacco, to avoid the ridiculously high taxes and regulatory requirements on cigarette tobacco. In a pipe it's not so good, I think, compared to real pipe tobacco. Oddly enough, though, it seems to work fine in cigarettes. On the other hand, it is tobacco which can be smoked in a pipe, and it is you who decides, good or bad, not me or the government.

Aromatics vs. non-aromatics

These are the two broadest subdivisions of pipe tobaccos. As a general rule, most beginning smokers tend to go for an "aromatic" tobacco, which has been "cased" or "topped" with flavorings such as vanilla, cherry, etc., while those converting from cigars or cigarettes often prefer an "non-aromatic" or "natural" tobacco.

Aromatics

A good aromatic tobacco is lightly topped or cased with natural flavorings. Aromatics tend to be more moist than non-aromatics due to these flavorings, which can lead to problems smoking them. These problems can be avoided if care is taken in the preparation of the tobacco and in the pack of the pipe. Do not be afraid of all aromatics, as many well respected high quality tobaccos fall in this category, and many experienced pipe smokers enjoy them.

Non-aromatics

These are tobaccos that contain no flavored additives; in fact, a good non-aromatic blend will contain no additives whatsoever, other than perhaps a bit of water.

Many well-meaning tobacconists do a disservice to the novice by suggesting a "mild" tobacco, especially an aromatic tobacco, to start with. Until the smoker is used to the mechanics of smoking a pipe, and has cultivated a sense for the flavors and aromas s/he will be experiencing, their sensory response is not dramatic. If they start with a mild tobacco, they will likely puff like a locomotive to attempt to get something out of it that resembles flavor, not to mention the difficulty they may have in keeping a pipe lit. If the tobacco is a goopy aromatic, the problem is magnified.

G. L. Pease recommendation on beginner's tobacco

"I generally recommend a full flavored, but not strong tobacco to the beginner. They'll be much more likely to get some flavor from their early experiences, and it will be much easier, then, for them to apprehend the idea of 'slowing down,' which is crucial to a great smoke. Once they've learned some of the mechanics of pipe smoking, and their senses have become accustomed to some of the myriad flavors tobaccos can present, they are better armed to move into more subtle, or 'mild' blends. For the beginner, 'mild' tobaccos are generally far from mild!"

From the G. L. Pease FAQ (<http://glpease.com/FAQ.html>), and used by permission.

Storage

The moisture content of a tobacco affects the way it smokes and tastes; a tobacco that is too moist or too dry will not offer a pleasing smoke. One way to determine if your tobacco has the proper level of moisture is the "pinch test." Take a pinch of your tobacco and squeeze it tightly for a couple of seconds, then release it. If it immediately starts to "unravel," your tobacco is in good shape. If it stays in a tight clump, it is too wet. If it crumbles, it is too dry.

Tobacco purchased in tins should retain its moisture for several weeks after opening. Blends purchased in "bulk," or tinned tobaccos that are to be stored for many weeks or months after opening should be stored in some type of container. Standard resealable zipper bags are not airtight, and your tobacco will dry out over time if they are used for storage. Similar bags designed for use in the freezer are better, but still aren't completely satisfactory for anything other than relatively short term storage. Some people advocate the use of multiple bags in a Tupperware container, "Mason" jars, or heat-sealed, vacuum-pack bags. All of these methods are satisfactory; however, I prefer to use bail-top jars with rubber gaskets.

If your tobacco is too moist, you can leave the container open slightly while monitoring it closely. If your tobacco has dried out, it is usually possible to revive it. (There is a point beyond which no amount of re-moistening is going to restore the flavor of a tobacco, but that time span is generally measured in months or years.) Some advocate placing a slice of apple or potato in the tobacco container. While that may introduce moisture, it will also introduce mold and other impurities. Unlike cheese, the flavor of tobacco is not improved by mold, and once your container has been so contaminated, it is almost impossible to completely rid it of the mold spores that will attempt to infest any tobacco placed in that container in the future. A much safer method is to spray a tiny amount of distilled water into the container and reseal it for a day or two, or purchase a ceramic humidifying disk from your tobacconist and place it in the storage container.

Smoking basics

"Breaking in" your pipe

The process of "breaking in" a pipe serves two functions. First, any saps, resins, acids, stains, demons, or other nasty things that have remained in the briar are driven out. Second, and most importantly, a "cake"--the layer of charred residue that builds up inside the bowl as tobacco is smoked in it--is developed. This cake protects the bowl of the pipe from the heat of burning tobacco and prevents it from "burning out." It should be noted that most of the information in this section applies to briar pipes only. Most other pipes require no break in period, or at most a very brief one. Additionally, one should not allow a cake to build up in a meerschaum or clay, as this could cause the bowl to crack.

It is important to smoke a new pipe slowly, to avoid damaging the naked briar. Some recommend that a new pipe be filled only one-third to one-half full for the first several smokes, after which the bowl can be filled a little more with each smoke. To be honest, this procedure is not necessary, but I always recommend it--and usually practice it--because it is all too easy to damage a new pipe through carelessness. Don't try to rush the break-in period, and don't be overly concerned if a new pipe has a bitter taste. Some pipes break in easier than others, and it is not uncommon for a pipe that is very difficult to break in to mature into a great smoker.

Some pipes are sold with a bowl coating designed to protect the briar until a cake is built up (sometimes such bowls are called "pre-carbonized"). Many pipes, however, are not so treated. While a "naked" bowl is not likely to be damaged so long as the pipe is smoked slowly, many people advocate preparing the bowl interior of a new pipe. Some recommend that the inside of the bowl be dampened with water to protect the briar, while others recommend honey, or a mixture of honey and water. Honey may help a cake form more quickly, but after trying all of these techniques I find that these days I tend to use nothing at all.

Finally, try not to smoke a new pipe outdoors if you can possibly avoid it. Even a gentle breeze will cause the pipe to burn much hotter than it would indoors, which can irreparably damage a briar that is not protected by a cake. I've never had a problem smoking my pipes outdoors (after they've been broken in, of course), but if you're concerned about possible damage, you can purchase wind caps from your tobacconist which will shield the burning tobacco from the effects of wind.

Fred Hanna has written an excellent article on this subject that we highly recommend called [The Mysteries of the Briar Break-in Process](#).

"Packing" your pipe

A pipe must be packed properly to ensure a good smoke; unfortunately, learning to do this takes time and practice. In fact, the art of packing a pipe is the most difficult task associated with pipe smoking, and this can be very frustrating for the beginner. I suspect that most people who have given up on trying to learn to smoke a pipe did so primarily because they couldn't master packing a bowl quickly enough to suit them.

The most common technique for packing a pipe is the "three layer" method. The objective is to end up with a bowl that is evenly packed from top to bottom; this is done by packing each layer progressively tighter. Trickle tobacco into the bowl until it is slightly overfull, then press very lightly with your finger until the bowl appears half full. Fill the pipe again and press down until the pipe is 2/3 to 3/4 full. Finally, overfill the pipe and press the top layer down fairly firmly. When finished the tobacco should feel "springy" to the touch. If it has no give at all, it's packed too tight. If a touch leaves an indentation, it is packed too loosely. Finally, test the "draw" by sucking air through the unlit pipe; the resistance should be about like that felt when sipping a soft drink through a straw. If the draw doesn't feel right, then empty the bowl and start over. A slightly different touch must be used depending on the size of the bowl and the cut and moisture level of the tobacco, but this will become second nature with experience. In fact, you will undoubtedly develop your own packing techniques with time, and you will find yourself loading your pipe without even thinking about it.

Frequently, the tiny smoke hole in the tobacco chamber may become clogged with tobacco, when filling and packing the bowl. It is not necessary to empty the bowl to correct this problem. Just remove the tip, and then clear the smoke hole with the reamer tool, a thin steel rod.

If you find yourself frustrated by the fact that you simply can't get the feel for packing your pipe, you might want to try a method suggested by Mike Butera. Mike recommends chopping the tobacco, reducing the ribbons into rectangles or squares about 1/4" long. The bowl is then packed as described above. Some people have found that this method can make the task of packing a bowl much easier. This is also known as a "Cube Cut" in which the tobacco is already sliced into the squares mentioned above. I have found that, although packing the pipe with a "Cube Cut" is easier and quicker, it can lead to tobacco flowing up the stem and into the users mouth, resulting in a rather unpleasant experience.

A recent pipe-packing technique known as "The Frank Method" has grown in favor, presented at the 2004 Chicagoland Pipe Show. See the following links: New York Pipe Club's presentation (http://www.newyorkpipeclub.com/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=415823&module_id=37917) or Jim Murray's site (<http://members.bellatlantic.net/~vze43wza/franck.html>). Here's a set of YouTube videos posted by Herr Frank demonstrating his pipe filling method Frank Method (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJP0JaNRw6Q>).

Lighting your pipe

Barring such bizarre contraptions as parabolic mirrors, lasers, and miniature blowtorches, there are three ways to light your pipe: with a match, with a butane lighter, or with a fluid lighter (e.g. a "Zippo").

The wooden match is the traditional pipe lighting device. Strike the match and hold it for a second or two while the sulfur burns off. Bring the match to the tobacco surface and, while puffing gently, move the match around the tobacco in a slow, even circle.

Butane lighters are more convenient than matches, and, unlike fluid lighters, there is less risk of imparting an unpleasant taste to your tobacco. If you wish to use a butane lighter, then purchase one that is designed for pipes. Such lighters have an angled gas outlet that makes it easier to direct the flame into the bowl while avoiding burned fingers.

Fluid lighters share the convenience feature of butane, and they provide the only truly reliable means of lighting a pipe in a stiff wind. Zippo makes a lighter designed for pipes that has a circular hole in the chimney which is placed over the bowl while the flame is "sucked" into the tobacco. Other types of fluid lighters may be used as well, but their broad flame makes it all too easy to char the rim of the pipe bowl. The primary disadvantage to fluid lighters is that they can impart a slight taste to the tobacco. Some swear that this can be prevented if one merely waits a few seconds after igniting the lighter before lighting the tobacco. I can still taste (smell?) the lighter fluid, however, and I prefer my tobacco sans naphtha.

Keeping your pipe lit

Don't be overly concerned if you have difficulty keeping your pipe lit at first. It is not unusual for even experienced smokers to have to re-light several times, especially toward the bottom of the bowl. Try to relax and enjoy yourself--that is the whole point, after all. You'll find it much easier to keep your pipe lit with practice.

Charring Light

The best way to keep your pipe lit is to light it correctly at the beginning. Most people light their pipe twice. Light the pipe as described above and puff a half dozen times or so. Then tamp the surface of the tobacco down with your pipe tool and re-light. The first lighting,

often called the "charring light" or "false light," will char the top of the tobacco and prepare this surface for the second lighting which will, with practice, take you through most of the bowl.

Tamping

While smoking, ash residue will form at the top of the tobacco. This residue should be gently tamped down periodically during the course of a smoke and prior to re-lighting. This tamping serves to keep the tobacco--which expands as it burns--properly packed and promotes even burning. If the pipe has an especially tall bowl, the ash may sometimes become so thick that it is difficult to re-light the tobacco below it. If this occurs, loosen the ash gently with your pipe tool, dump the ash, tamp, and re-light.

Clogs

Sometimes while smoking, the tiny smoke hole in the tobacco chamber may become clogged with tobacco, especially after tamping, and even though you can draw on the pipe, you can't get much smoke. Assuming there is tobacco remaining to be smoked, just remove the tip, and then clear the smoke hole with the reamer tool, a thin steel rod, and then relight the pipe.

Smoking Pace

The pace at which you smoke (i.e. the rhythm at which you puff your pipe) is very important. With practice and experimentation you will achieve the perfect pace for you. The idea is to puff frequently enough to keep the tobacco lit, but not so frequently as to cause the pipe to burn too hot, which contributes to tongue bite and may damage your pipe. If you can't hold the bowl of your pipe comfortably in your hand, or if you can't hold the side of the bowl against your face for more than a few seconds, then you're smoking too fast. If this happens, set the pipe down for a few minutes to cool, then re-light and start again. Someone once described the perfect smoking pace as one where the pipe is always on the verge of going out.

Basic pipe maintenance

Cleaning

Your pipe should be cleaned after each smoke. To do this, first let the pipe cool and then scoop or dump out any ash and "dottle" (unburned tobacco that sometimes remains in the bottom of the bowl). Do not bang the pipe against a hard surface, as this may result in a cracked shank or broken stem. Believe me, I lost a whole pipe after I did this on a rail over a creek. The pipe broke in half, fell in and sailed down the creek and out into a nearby river. Instead of using brute force, buy a pipe nail; they cost \$1-\$2 and you can use the long end to scoop the tobacco out of the pipe, and afterwards, blow through the empty pipe to remove any remaining dottle. Once the bowl is empty, run a pipe cleaner through the stem until it just enters the bowl and remove it. Repeat with additional cleaners until they come out clean (many people, myself included, will use both ends of a pipe cleaner before switching to a new one). Finally, take one of the used cleaners, bend it into a "U" shape, and wipe out the ash clinging to the sides of the bowl. [NOTE: Some people prefer to leave the ash in the bowl, believing that it promotes a good cake. If you like, try both ways and see what works best for you.] Set the pipe aside to dry completely. *Ideally*, the pipe should be allowed to "rest" for around 48 hours before smoking it again, but you might have to forgo this luxury until you have enough pipes to do so.

Periodically, you'll want to clean your pipe a bit more thoroughly. In addition to the steps above, you'll also want to carefully remove the stem from the shank and wipe out the "gunk" that collects in the mortise; a cotton swab (e.g. a "Q-tip") works well for this task. Some people also advocate periodic cleaning of the stem and shank with pipe cleaners soaked in alcohol (preferably some form of grain alcohol), particularly if the pipe begins to taste a bit musty or sour. Do not, however, get alcohol anywhere near the bowl of a meerschaum pipe.

CAUTION! PAY ATTENTION HERE!! Never, ever, ever take the stem out of a pipe while it is still hot. Allow the pipe to cool for at least an hour before attempting to remove the stem. [I'm of the opinion that you should let the pipe dry completely before removing the stem, as well.] Repeatedly removing the stem from a hot pipe will result in a loose stem at best, and you may even end up with a broken tenon or a cracked shank. With that said, there are pipes that are designed to have their stem removed while still hot. This sort of stem is called a "military bit" or an "army mount," since pipes such as these were originally designed for military men (I'm not being non-PC; there simply weren't any military women in those days), who might have needed to stow their pipes on short notice. The stem's tenon on such a pipe is tapered to provide a friction fit, and the shank is almost always reinforced with a metal "cup" or band.

See Also: Pipe care/cleaning

"Tongue bite"

"Tongue bite," an intense burning sensation of the tongue, is an unpleasant side effect often experienced by the new pipe smoker (it is also experienced by non-newbies who take up the pipe again after a period of abstinence). While irritating, it will usually go away after a week or so of smoking. If you experience this problem for an extended period, then you may be smoking a tobacco that's too moist, you may have failed to pack the bowl properly, or you're smoking too fast. Some tongue bite sufferers have also experienced relief by using an oral rinse sold under the name "Biotene." It works for some; you might want to try it. Others have suggested that red wine may also ease the sufferer's symptoms and many have reported their success with this method.

"Gurgling"

This is caused by moisture collecting in the bottom of the bowl and/or in the shank or stem. Possible causes of "gurgle" are:

The pipe has design problems

Some pipe designs or implementations tend to cause gurgling, or a wetter than average smoke. In most cases this is caused by an abrupt interruption of the airflow, which will cause condensation to form as the heated smoke is restricted and then expands. A smooth continuous air flow is ideal. Interruptions in this airflow can be caused by several different issues. Some smokers feel it is critical that the stem's tenon should meet the bottom of the mortise in the shank. Others do not feel this is critical. This fit is often neglected in factory-made pipes. Another cause might be the air hole in the stem and shank are not perfectly aligned, often found on bent pipes. If this is the case, a pipe cleaner might also catch abruptly at the junction of shank and stem. An interruption can also be caused if the air way is not carefully "funneled" between the rounder, larger-diameter hole at the tenon side of the stem and the flatter, wider slot and the bit. A more open draw

facilitated by a larger air hole in the shank and stem is also considered an advantage by many smokers, and not by others. Regardless of the particulars, it seems clear that pipe mechanics play a part in the tendency for a particular smoker to experience problems with a particular pipe and tobacco combination.

Smoking too fast

Water vapor is a by-product of combustion, and rapid smoking will produce large amounts of it, which will then condense in the shank and stem.

Smoking a pipe that is not yet broken-in

I'm not certain if this occurs because the briar has not dried completely, because there is no cake, or "just because." Still, a new pipe will often smoke wet.

Smoking a tobacco that is too moist

This is self explanatory. In addition, some tobaccos--particularly aromatics--tend to leave more liquid residue than others.

Smoking a tobacco with too much humectant

Some tobaccos contain large amounts of Propylene Glycol or other additives that may create grease and cause gurgling.

Saliva in the pipe

Salivation is a normal response to smoking, and this saliva can collect in the stem. Keep your tongue away from the mouthpiece opening, and try to keep your mouth as dry as possible.

If your pipe begins to gurgle while smoking, run a pipe cleaner down the stem to absorb the moisture. This can be a bit tricky with some bent pipes, but it's usually possible if you put a small bend in the end of the cleaner and rotate it "just right."

Estratto da "https://pipedia.org/index.php?title=Pipe_Packing_and_Smoking_techniques&oldid=22919"



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