

Tongue Bite in Pipe Smokers

Don't let your tongue get bitten! Tongue Bite is a fairly common problem among pipe smokers; even veteran smokers can experience it from time to time. Aromatics tend to be the biggest villains when it comes to tongue bite. They tend to be very moist and burn hot, which produces very hot steam, which is the root cause of tongue bite. Fortunately, I have not experienced any real bad tongue bite in a few years. However, like most new pipe smokers, I did experience some major tongue bite when I first began [smoking pipes](#).

Another cause of tongue bite is the packing of the tobacco. If it's packed too tight or too loose, this will produce either a hard or loose draw, which will in turn make the tobacco burn hot....as a result...tongue bite. If you find you've packed your pipe too lightly, you can always use a packing tool and tamp it a bit tighter. But, if you've packed it too tight from the start, it's very hard to loosen it up...shy of dumping the bowl and starting again.

Also, puff rate is critical. If you smoke fast, it will burn hot and produce tongue bite. Pipe smoking is meant to be relaxing and enjoyable. It's not a race, take your time. Take the time to select your pipe and a tobacco blend. Pack slowly and lightly...fire it up and enjoy!

As I mentioned, aromatic blends and packing technique are at fault many times for tongue bite. Another reason is the type of tobacco. Virginia blends can burn hot, especially straight Virginia's. Virginia tobaccos are naturally high in sugar, which burns hot when puffed fast. Virginia tobaccos like Russ's [Hearth & Home Virginia Memory](#) and [Virginia Night](#) are wonderful....they have great flavor and aroma, but if smoked fast, they will rip your tongue up pretty bad. Many wonderful tobacco blends have Virginia tobaccos as a base and such things as Latakia, Perique, Burley and Cavendish are added to create unique, cool smoking pipe tobacco blends.

So, the lesson learned here is to pack less tight and smoke SLOWLY. I've

been an English tobacco smoker for over 20 years (I love Latakia and Perique) and totally enjoy many blends. I even smoke Virginia blends, but I've learned that a slow smoke and light pack are the best way to truly get the most enjoyment from my pipes....no matter the blend.

Take it slow, relax and enjoy!

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Whether you're already an experienced pipe smoker or just a starry-eyed beginner, you've probably heard about tongue burn – the bane of pipe smokers everywhere. Don't worry, it happens to just about everyone at some point or another in the beginning. Tongue burn definitely sucks, so we've pulled together some tips in the hopes that you'll be able to avoid them altogether.

Develop Your Technique

You may be asking, "How does one puff hot smoke without burning oneself?"

The answer, my friend, is technique. In short, don't pull so hard. Over-smoking draws in more air, creating a bigger flame, and thus generating more heat, steam, and smoke capable of burning your mouth. Smoking your pipe with slower, more controlled pulls will keep the flame alight without forcing it to scorch the entire bowl, giving you that cool air of sophistication that separates dorky novices from debonair pipesmen. Mastering a controlled technique goes a long way towards never having to worry about tongue burn again.

Watch Out For Moisture

Excessive moisture is the biggest culprit behind tongue burn cases in smokers. Blends that are still extremely moist generate very high temperature steam when lit and stoked, especially when stoked excessively. This leads to the standard burn we've grown to loathe.

Another issue to look out for is moisture getting trapped in the pipe itself. We recommend periodic cleanings with a pipe cleaner. If you definitely prefer your blends moist and fresh, but are tired of being burned, grab a pipe with a filter and puff away to your content. Honestly, 9 times out of 10, if you're suffering from constant tongue burn, you're having a moisture issue and should probably dry your blends a little more and be sure to keep your pipe clear of moisture.

Adjust Your Blends

Now things get a little more technical. Tongue burn is the result of a chemical burn to the mouth. The question to understand in order to avoid the burn is, what causes this to occur at all? Research pins the blame on the differing pH characteristics inherent in individual blends, which react with people's mouths differently. Plainly stated, some blends may just be too "spicy" for some people. Of course, not everyone is susceptible to tongue burn just like everyone isn't allergic to peanuts. The key here is understanding what applies to you.

To combat this, we recommend adjusting your blend for a more balanced pH, as well as staying away from acidic drinks during and just after smoking. Acidic blends like Virginias can offset more alkaline blends like Burleys. Try experimenting with different percentages to find a blend that's right for you.

Treat Yourself

So, now you know what tongue burn is and how to avoid it. But what if you already have one? What if you're the poor soul who stumbled upon this article seeking a cure? Fear not friend, we've got that too.

Aside from drinking water constantly as a way of life, we also recommend drinking it during and after a good smoke. If you feel a tongue burn coming on then the best thing to do is apply ice to the area to soothe it and sleep on it. The next morning should greet you feeling much better, and with everything else you've learned here, you can rest assured knowing how to avoid tongue burn in the future.

Dear Hank,

I have been a pipe smoker for more than 40 years and I still get tongue bite and my tongue burns like fire. I have tried different pipes and many different tobacco brands. Half and Half is my favorite but it bites and burns. What can you suggest?

A. Walker

Dear A. Walker,

40 years and still feeling the fire of of wrath? Have you considered the possibility that God simply doesn't want you to enjoy a pipe? Perhaps you were born fit for chewing tobacco and you simply missed your destiny? Always a possibility I suppose.

If you are, however, determined to keep smoking your pipe (and I don't think any of us here at PipesMagazine.com would blame you) we can go back to the briar board and find out what's really happening.

As I understand it, there are a couple of different schools of thought around tongue bite.

1) The school of arrogance says, "You're simply smoking too fast, slow down and puff at a much lower cadence and you'll notice everything gets better."

2) The school of baccy says, "It's a chemistry thing and you just need to change what you're smoking." In this thinking, blends from another manufacturer might just not bother you. I, for one, am a huge fan of Hearth and Home's Classic Burley Kake. If you're looking for that old-time burley feel of old-fashioned Half and Half, it wont be the same, but might capture the essence. Perhaps you've just been looking in the wrong tin.

3) The school of wise old pipe smokers says, "You're not drinking enough whiskey."

While I think number 2 is probably the most accurate, I always prefer to first extensively test that the problem isn't related to number 3. Then I work my way backwards on the list.

Double (maybe triple) checking just to making sure I don't have tongue bite tonight,

Hank