

## A Run on Toilet Paper

Yes, there is a pun intended in the title. Among the phenomena demonstrated by consumers throughout the “civilized” world during the coronavirus pandemic was panic buying and hoarding. That would be understandable when it comes to medical supplies such as personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitizers and OTC medicine. But one item loomed large – toilet paper, sometimes euphemistically called bathroom tissue or loo roll. There were even fights over it. I put together a short list of information which I passed around, more in levity than seriousness. In these uncertain times, we could use a little stress reducer. Little did I know that columnists from major newspapers were already thinking of issuing columns devoted to toilet paper. A psychologist even expounded on the phenomenon of hoarding, using toilet paper as an example. We’ll get to these subjects later.

First, here’s my enhanced list, which I originally emailed on March 21:

- The first people to use toilet paper were the Chinese. After all, they invented paper, didn't they? But paper was a valued product, so only the elites used it.
- The Romans had communal toilets. After doing their business, they used a sponge on a stick, one sponge per toilet. You were supposed to rinse the sponge off every time.



- Toilet paper in the U.S. is a \$13 Billion business. That is more than the combined revenue of all 30 Major league baseball teams.
- Now, to answer the question you always wanted to ask; the average person uses 9 sheets per trip. How do you compare?
- Research indicates that men like to fold their toilet paper while women make wads. Did they ask or install a camera in the stall?
- In terms of weight, the average annual per capital consumption is 22 pounds of toilet paper
- To supply the world with toilet paper, 27,000 trees are harvested every day.
- Procter & Gamble has over a one third share of the toilet paper market. Charmin is the leading brand.
- Some brands use recycled paper, but Charmin only uses "virgin" pulp. Honestly, do you want recycled toilet paper?
- For years, Charmin's pitchman was Mr. Whipple, who uttered the famous words *please don't squeeze the Charmin*. Played by actor Dick Wilson, he was one of the most recognizable pitchmen on TV, making over 500 Charmin commercials. Mr. Wilson made a handsome living just appearing in Charmin ads.
- Filipinos like to use water instead of toilet paper. There is always a quart sized ladle, called a *tabo*, in their CR (comfort room), used for cleaning.



- For the best experience, I would rather have a Toto, a Japanese brand of toilet. They are equipped with seats that automatically go up or down (motion activated?), seat warmer, adjustable hot/cold spray, a blow dryer and disinfectant. No paper needed! Toto has a brand called Neorest ranging in price from around \$4,000 to over \$10,000. Some are available from Amazon, free shipping with Prime. Next time you have a layover at any

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Tokyo airport, check out Toto's toilets. The airline lounges will have the latest models. Below is the water spray control panel.



- Here's the best part of all. Virtually all toilet paper we use is made in the USA!. Less than 10% is imported, from our USMCA (formerly NAFTA) partners.

Now for the more serious discussion. Dr. Jay L. Zagorsky, a researcher at Ohio State University for more than 20 years, presently associated with Boston University, has written about why people hoard toilet paper. His article appears at:

<https://www.socialsciencespace.com/2020/03/why-are-people-hoarding-toilet-paper/>

Dr. Zagorsky has researched out a variety of topics, such as "*Are Blondes Really Dumb?*" The short answer is no, blondes are actually smarter. He brings impressive credentials to the psychology of why people hoard.

The three major U.S. newspapers are the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Washington Post. Within the past week, a columnist from each of the papers wrote about.....you guessed it, toilet paper!

The New York Times first weighed in on this subject, in a piece written by Kate Murphy, using a challenging title: "*Stop Using Toilet Paper*"

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/03/opinion/toilet-paper-hoarding-bidets.html>

Though not quite the academic, Ms. Murphy brings anthropology and medical science into the discussion. We learn that the most widely cited text on toilet paper is "*Toilet Hygiene in the Classical Era.*" The book's author is Frenchman Philippe Charlier, a forensic anthropologist who studies coprolite, which is fossilized poo. Monsieur Charlier could probably tell you what the Pharaohs ate for supper. Ms. Murphy is not a proponent of toilet paper, saying medical experts agree that the use of water for rinsing is "infinitely more sanitary and environmentally sound." Bidets and toilet attachments are recommended. One last tidbit – during the French Revolution, Marie Antoinette was provided with a bidet in her prison cell.

Andy Kessler is a columnist for the Wall Street Journal. He has just written a piece called "*Ode to American Toilet Paper.*" Here's the link: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ode-to-american-toilet-paper-11586112316?mod=searchresults&page=1&pos=1> (The article appeared in the print edition on April 6. Sometimes the link may not be accessible to nonsubscribers.) Among other things, Mr. Kessler describes his experience with a Toto Washlet add-on, with "*lots of buttons and even an LCD.*" His conclusion? "*I'll readily admit that I can't live without it.*"

Another Wall Street Journal writer named Joseph Barrett delved into the use of barter to obtain toilet paper.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/still-cant-buy-toilet-paper-you-can-barter-for-it-11586614556?mod=searchresults&page=1&pos=2>

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Toilet paper has apparently been bartered for restaurant food, even a dress. The Girl Scouts enticed prospective buyers of their G.S. cookies by throwing in a roll. They soon sold out. Those girls have a future in marketing.

At the Washington Post, no less than their senior editor Marc Fisher expounded on the subject, with a somewhat unwieldy title. "*Flushing out the true cause of the global toilet paper shortage amid coronavirus pandemic*" You can read the full article at: <https://wapo.st/2RqSlyM>. Mr. Fisher even interviewed Ronald Blumer, the author of a book on toilet paper. You can order Mr. Blumer's book, "*Wiped: The Curious History of Toilet Paper*" from Amazon. So now, we've introduced you to two toilet paper historians. As Ms. Murphy attests, there are more toilet paper historians out there than you think. From what I can observe, they seem to like puns too.

It only took a pandemic to make me realize that there are toilet paper devotees among writers. But I beat their publication date by two weeks. Had I anticipated these eruditions from great newspapers, I would have conducted more research and expanded my list. Incidentally, what do people with papyrophobia use instead?

P.S. 4/19/2020 Well, it has been more than a week since I wrote the original essay, but the great newspapers can't seem to let go. The Wall Street Journal just came out with another article, by Christopher Mims. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/bidet-makers-see-their-moment-and-scramble-to-make-a-splash-11587182402?mod=searchresults&page=1&pos=1>

No, Mr. Mims didn't write about toilet paper, but instead about the alternative – bidets. It seems that people are giving bidets another run (poor pun). Since stand alone bidets are expensive the alternative is an attachment for your regular toilet seat. You can get them at Home Depot. Go for it. One last factoid – 80% of Japanese households have bidets. Maybe it's one of the factors that contribute to their longevity.

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April 6, 2020