



how to taste chocolate

Enjoying chocolate should involve exploration, learning, and all of your senses. Sit back, relax and become a true chocolate connoisseur whilst indulging in one of our finest collections of beautiful handmade chocolates.

Each individual chocolate offers its own distinctive flavours, textures and aromas, allowing an appreciation of the wealth of variety that can be created from the fruits of the Cacao tree. As with wine tasting, there are a few simple steps to truly savouring fine quality chocolate. Chocolate should always be stored in a cool, dry and odour free environment, but not in the fridge. Allow it to reach room temperature (18-20°C) before tasting. Begin with white chocolate, followed by the milk varieties, and move onto the stronger flavours of dark chocolate. Before you begin, sip a little water and lime juice to cleanse the palate. And repeat after every tasting.

When tasting chocolate there are a number of things to keep in mind to evaluate each aspect of the chocolate being tasted. Though we each prefer certain types of chocolate at certain times, it is always possible to give a full evaluation of any chocolate being tasted. The wider our base of chocolate experience, the better able we are to choose the best chocolate for us at any given moment. Here are a few things to consider each time you bite into a chocolate experience.

Appearance

Before you bite, take a moment to have a look at the chocolate. Appearance can say a lot about the chocolate. Chocolate should be shiny and even its coloration. The surface of the chocolate should show no whitish streaks or dots, indicative of bloom from bad storage conditions or incorrect handling. Chocolate should look even and free of cracks, dots, streaks, and fog.

Aroma

Next, before the first nibble, experience the aroma of the chocolate. Good chocolate should have a rich, chocolaty, flavorful smell, and should not be at all burned, smoky, or scentless. The best chocolate will not give off any scent of chemicals or impure additives – if this is detectable it is a good time to put the chocolate down and move on to the next sample. Flavored chocolate can have aromatic elements of the flavorings, but they should not overpower the most important element – the chocolate. When broken, fresh chocolate will smell as it should – of chocolate.

Snap

One last step before the best part (tasting!), testing the break of the chocolate. This part is referred to as the 'snap'. Chocolate should break clean and crisp, without crumbling or breaking into layers. Be certain the chocolate is at the correct temperature, and certainly not directly out of the refrigerator. Chocolate that is too cold will splinter, while chocolate that is too warm will warp and separate. Chocolate should never crumble or break into layers, as this is a sure sign that it is not good. Ideally, chocolate will break cleanly with an audible 'snap' and a crisp break.

Taste

SOLID CHOCOLATE

Now for the best part, take your first bite! Break off a bit with your teeth and let it sit between your tongue and the roof of your mouth. Move it around and observe the effects. The chocolate should begin to melt immediately with an even texture, as chocolate melts at human body temperature.

The feeling of the chocolate in your mouth ('Mouthfeel') should be creamy, velvety, smooth and soft, free of any grease, grit, grain, wax or gum. Pay attention to the 'flavors', both subtle and strong. The best chocolates of all types will be well balanced, not too sweet and not too bitter. Any additives to the chocolate such as fruits, nuts, spices and liquors should be present, but in no way overpowering. Chocolate should always be the main flavor. The flavor should be full and mellow with no artificial, burned, harsh, or flat overtones. An 'aftertaste' is the last quality to watch for when tasting chocolate. A good chocolate will not disappear immediately, but will leave subtle and pleasant sensations in the mouth.

Chew the chocolate to expand the surface area and release the second level of flavours and aromas. By rolling the chocolate around the tongue you will experience the full range of flavours by triggering the four taste zones – sweet and salty (tip of the tongue), sour (sides) and bitter (back).

FILLED CHOCOLATES

Place the chocolate in your mouth and allow it to melt for a few seconds. This will release the first flavours and aromas. Chew the chocolate to blend the filling and the coating. Now let it melt slowly in your mouth and enjoy the lingering tastes.

Selection of chocolate

Before you purchase a chocolate, look at the label. Chocolate with a high cocoa content can be a good indicator of a quality chocolate. Look for chocolate that contains cocoa butter, and not other vegetable fats. Chocolate made with cocoa butter will have a smoother texture and a more chocolaty taste.

Check to be sure that the chocolate is made with real, not imitation, vanilla bean. Imitation vanilla gives the chocolate a chemical taste. Note the sugar content, as a lot of sugar, especially in bittersweet and semisweet chocolates is often an attempt to hide off flavors of poor quality cocoa beans. Do a quick aroma test as well. Don't base a whole lot on this quick sniff, as it is hard to get a fair read through wrappers, but if you do get a good chocolate aroma through the papers, that is certainly a good sign.

Check the length of the ingredient list; it should be short. Good chocolate will not have a long list of additives. Check the end of the ingredient list for chemical preservatives.

GANACHE

As a filling a ganache is as close as you will get to the taste of pure chocolate and you should be tasting the chocolate and not the cream. The cream is just there to create that beautifully smooth texture in the most natural and neutral possible way. When tasting your ganache filling you can evaluate its texture and aromas in the same way as tasting solid chocolate. The coating should be as fine as possible and as good as the filling since they will be mixing in your mouth during tasting and enjoying!

PRALINE

The praline filling also has its origins in France and takes its name from the 17th century sugar industrialist the Duke of Plessin-Praslin. The principal ingredients of a Praline are ground sugar coated nuts. Belgium chocolates are referred to as pralines since in 1912 the Belgian Jean Neuhaus invented the process of filling chocolate casings with nut pastes and creating the first pralines but elsewhere praline refers to a nut based filling and forms the base for many other flavoured centres.

Walker's praline is made from ground hazelnuts, sugar to taste and blended with a chocolate ganache. You should be able to identify the hazelnut taste and experience the slightly textured finish. A good praline should not be too sweet.

MARZIPAN

Marzipan is a paste created from ground almonds and sugar and is believed to have its origins in the Middle East. It has been used throughout Europe since the Middle Ages with documented use in Britain in dating back to the late 15th century. Good marzipan should be slightly grainy and made with a ratio of 60% almonds to 40% sugar and again should not be too sweet. Walkers marzipan is made with 70% almonds making it a premium blend with an intense almond flavour.

And finally... Enjoy!

For up to date information on our seasonal selections visit our website and online shop at www.walkershandmadechocolates.co.uk

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