



Today we celebrate a sacred day in our Sweet Street community. That day is National Chocolate Day. Our friend, sweet, glorious and rich chocolate. Here's a little history of this craveable ingredient, found in many of our desserts, and why we just can't get enough of it.

Brief History



Chocolate, as you may well know, comes from the cocoa bean, which have been growing on trees in South and Central America for over 100 million years. Cocoa trees started growing in the lower slopes of the Andes Mountains. They live in hot and rainy areas close to the Equator. The cocoa beans come from a large fruit such as this: They are full of vitamins like magnesium and Vitamin C, but they are quite bitter. They also contain a fair amount of caffeine. People started farming cocoa as early as 15,000 BC in South America. Cocoa farming spread quickly to North and Central America and by 2000 BC, people of Mexico were grinding cocoa beans and making them into a hot or cold spicy chocolate drink. Making various concoctions, they sometimes used honey to sweeten the chocolate.

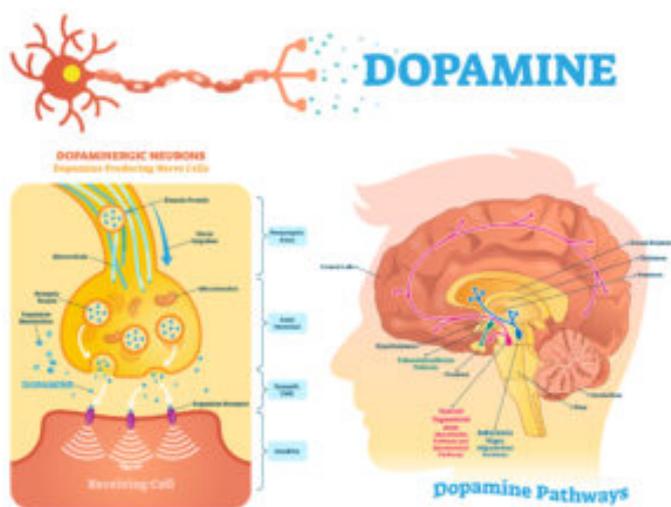


By 200s BC, during Aztec Empire, cocoa beans became an important trade item as the people in the north could not grow their own due to climate restrictions. Thus, the migration into Arizona and Colorado. The government soon made people use cocoa beans as money and the farmers could not afford to actually eat them anymore. Only the rich were privileged enough to drink chocolate drinks. In the late 1400s Ad, when Spanish invaders came to Mexico and America's Southwest, they tried chocolate delicacies made for the rich and they brought it back to Europe with them.

What We Crave

Today, chocolate is distributed everywhere and is meant for everyone. Variations of chocolate have been developed and endless dessert items have been created from this ancient ingredient. But why do we love it so much?

Dr. Stavnezer says "We crave chocolate because it is good!" It tastes, feels and smells good. Those feelings are the result of our brain releasing chemicals, dopamine, in response to the experience. Dopamine is that feel-good neurotransmitter that is released whenever we enjoy something and is part of our reward circuit. However, this circuit is part of our uniquely designed genetics. Thus, some people claim they don't like chocolate... Crazy!



Chocolate also contains theobromine that can increase heart rate and arouse the senses, caffeine that makes us feel awake and increases focus, fat and sugar, preferred food sources due to calorie density.

Our brain creates a memory of this positive experience through the hippocampus. Therefore, every time we eat chocolate we are strengthening and reinforcing that reward system (dopamine response) and the memory of feel-good sensations associated with it.

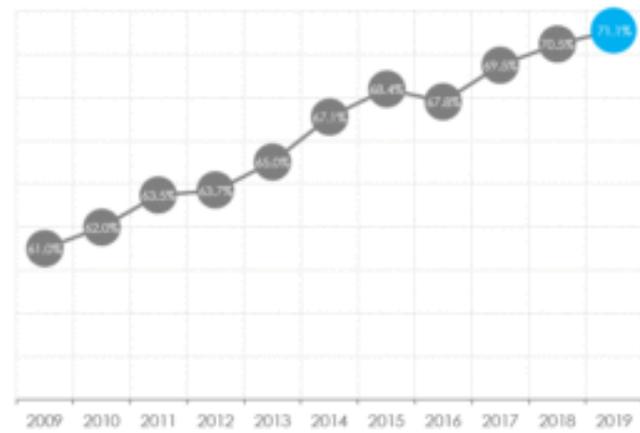
The Numbers

The numbers speak for themselves. According to Data Essential, chocolate is on 71.1% of US menus with a high versatility score. Chocolate can be found in cakes, brownies, cookies, candy, pies, ice cream, milk shakes, cheesecake, pudding, dessert bars, custards, mousses, fudge, pastries and much more. It's popularity continues to grow, with no end in sight.

CHOCOLATE

HISTORIC MENU PENETRATION

% of US restaurant menu
that feature



71.1% menu penetration

menu growth rate

1 YEAR	4 YEAR	SINCE 2009
+1%	+4%	+17%

Sources:

<https://quatr.us/south-america/chocolate-come-south-america.htm>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/comfort-cravings/201402/why-do-we-crave-chocolate-so-much>

<https://apps.datassential.com/snap/food?q=CHOCOLATE>