

Why Your Brain and Santa Like Chocolate Chip Cookies



Chocolate chip cookies and a large glass of milk go together. Everyone knows that – including Santa Claus. Leaving out a plate of cookies and milk on Christmas Eve is a time-honored tradition. Children may be concerned for Santa's long night and want to make sure he has sustenance along the way. Or, more likely, if they think if there's a margin of error on the naughty list, Santa is more kindly if there's a plate of chocolate chip cookies waiting.

Either way, Santa and Santa's helpers have a long night ahead of them and a break for chocolate chip cookies and milk is just what's needed.

While you can have chocolate chips cookies anytime, it seems they become more special at the holidays.

If you have been resisting them all year as part of a healthy lifestyle, the temptation may suddenly be too great to bear. Or, holiday stress and overwhelm warrant breaking the rules, just this once.

More likely, the temptation for a chocolate chip cookie experience is embedded in your brain.

Memories of Chocolate Chip Cookies

Your brain remembers your first taste of a chocolate chip cookie, the aroma of freshly baked ones coming from the oven, and the memory of being able to bake your first batch by yourself, even if it came from freezer dough. Every bite calls forth these sensations from your memory file of chocolate chip cookies.

But, there's something else that makes for these memories. Chemistry professor, Matthew Hartings, of American University explains why the chocolate chip cookie experience is so powerful.

First, both chocolate and milk contain fat and emulsifiers. Chocolate has phospholipids which allow fat to mix (emulsify) with non-fats. This is why it has such a smooth consistency when cocoa butter and cocoa powder are mixed. Milk also has its own emulsifiers. They act to blend its fats into its rich creamy taste.

When taken together, according to Hartings, it's the milk that now emulsifies the chocolate chip cookie so that you get a richer and fuller cookie flavor.

Second, there's a memory of an "integrated sensory experience" which is a merger of flavor and aroma. Your brain receptors pick up the different molecules being released from the taste buds and saliva, as well as, the aromatic molecules. Together they mingle and merge to create a new sensation.

Each new milk and chocolate chip cookie experience goes into the memory file and is compared to previous memories. That's why a homemade chocolate chip cookie with whole milk may elicit a warmer and tastier feeling than store-bought chocolate chip cookies with skim milk.

The Bliss of Chocolate Chip Cookies

But, wait you say, you're favorite chocolate chip cookie is a store-bought brand!

Dr. David Kessler, former head of the Food and Drug Administration, points to the food industry tapping into your bliss point where its brain circuitry sensation is tied to a desire for more.

“Besides flavorings and additives, they [the food industry] are, according to Dr. Kessler, also manipulating the combinations of salt, sugar, and fats to not only stimulate your brain's circuitry loops of pleasure but enhance it to a bliss point level with multi-layered taste sensations.”

If you're Santa or one of Santa's helpers, it's understandable why a plate of chocolate chip cookies and a glass of milk is tempting. What do you think? Is it time for a little bliss?

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