

The Twisted Truth about Pretzels



Pretzels come in hard, soft, salty, and sweet varieties.



Did you know?

National Pretzel Day is an unofficial annual holiday on April 26, celebrating...pretzels!

They come in hard and soft **varieties**.¹ They can be eaten salty or sweet, plain or paired with dips. They're excellent as both on-the-go snacks and at-home treats. Pretzels are a **versatile**² food item beloved in the eyes of many people. Let's discover how pretzels gained their popularity and the process through which they are made.

1 **varieties** - types

2 **versatile** - able to be used in many ways

The History of Pretzels

The origin of the pretzel is unclear, but what is known is that pretzels date back many centuries. There are records of paintings from the 1100s containing pretzels, so the snack food has been around since at least the Middle Ages.

There are many legends as to how the pretzel received its unique shape. The most practical explanation is that the pretzels were made with loops to make it easy for bakers to hang them from the ceiling. In the olden days, pretzels were only eaten soft, as a bread-like food.

In the late 1700s, many people from Germany and Switzerland immigrated to the U.S., bringing the tradition of pretzels with them. Many of these immigrants settled in Pennsylvania and became known as the Pennsylvania Dutch. The pretzels quickly grew in popularity in Pennsylvania and soon spread all over the U.S. Today, Pennsylvania is still the state that **consumes**³ the most pretzels. In fact, the average Pennsylvanian eats 12 times the number of pretzels than the average American eats!



The Sturgis Pretzel House in Lititz, Pennsylvania, was the first bakery to sell hard pretzels.

In 1850, the first hard pretzel was invented. Can you guess from which state it originated? Pennsylvania! The Sturgis Pretzel House in Lititz, Pennsylvania, became the first bakery to sell hard pretzels. Over time, the market expanded, and pretzel factories opened all across America. In 1935, the Reading Pretzel Machinery Company introduced the very first pretzel-making machine, which automatically twisted and salted the pretzels.

The Pretzel-Making Process

The main ingredients of pretzels are flour, water, and yeast. The flour and water are stored in large containers and are then automatically combined in a machine to form a wet mass called gluten. Gluten formation allows the dough to be stretched and shaped without breaking.

Next, the yeast is added. Yeast is an **essential**⁴ ingredient, as it creates air pockets in the dough. This makes the pretzels lighter and crispier.

Last, the rest of the ingredients are mixed into the batter. A small amount of fat gives the dough a better texture and helps the pretzels taste good for longer. Salt and sugar are also added to give the pretzels more flavor.

³ **consumes** – eats; uses

⁴ **essential** – very important

Once the ingredients are combined, the dough is left on its own for about 30 minutes. This allows for the yeast to react with the other ingredients, and the dough can then begin to rise.

Now, it's time for the famous pretzel-twisting process! Are you picturing rows of bakers **clad**⁵ in white uniforms, lovingly twisting each pretzel into its unique shape? If so, you're in for some disappointment! Nowadays, not only are pretzels not twisted by hand, but they usually aren't twisted at all! Instead, the complex pretzel design is made by stamping the shape into a square of dough, similarly to how a cookie cutter works. Once the pretzel shape is formed, the extra dough from the holes and edges is removed and re-rolled to be used again.

Next up—bath time! The shaped pretzels are placed onto a conveyor belt that carries them to a **lye**⁶ bath. The trip intentionally takes a few minutes to give the pretzels some more time to rise in their correct shape. At the end of the conveyor belt is a tub filled with a **solution**⁷ containing hot water and lye. The pretzels are **submerged**⁸ in the bath for about 30 seconds and then float to the top. The purpose of the bath is to give the pretzels their **customary**⁹ dark coating. It also makes the outside sticky so that the salt can be easily attached.

After the bath, salt crystals are sprinkled over the pretzels. Now, it's time for the baking process!

The pretzels enter a large oven, with a temperature between 350 and 550 degrees Fahrenheit. The front of the oven is hotter than the back, so the pretzels are slowly moved to the back as they bake. The hotter temperature at the front **caramelizes**¹⁰ the sticky outside caused by the lye bath, giving the pretzels their brown coating. The cooler temperature at the back gives the pretzels the chance to let out their moisture. It's important that the pretzels be completely dry so that they will have a longer shelf life. The pretzels spend about four to eight minutes inside the oven, but the baking process is not yet finished!

Once the pretzels leave the oven, they are transferred to a second oven! This oven, which has a cooler temperature of only 250 degrees Fahrenheit, allows the pretzels to harden completely. The process can take between 20 and 40 minutes.

Finally, the pretzels look ready to be eaten! After they cool off, they're packaged and weighed. Then, they are shipped out to stores around the world, ready to be bought and eaten by consumers like you!



Swiss butterbrezels

5 **clad** – dressed

6 **lye** – chemical used to treat or preserve food

7 **solution** – liquid mixture

8 **submerged** – completely covered by liquid

9 **customary** – usual; normal

10 **caramelizes** – turns from sugar into caramel

Pretzel Traditions

Did you know that America is one of the only countries that eats pretzels in their hard, crunchy form? Most countries only eat soft pretzels. In Switzerland, they have what's called a "butterbrezel." That's a large, soft pretzel sliced like a roll and filled with lots of butter. In Denmark, they have "kringle," a cross between a pretzel and a croissant. In the U.K., Auntie Anne's is a popular pretzel store that sells "Twix Rolls"—a soft pretzel with a chocolate bar hidden inside!



A Danish kringle

How do you like your pretzels? Straight out of the bag? Dipped into peanut butter? Coated in chocolate? This simple snack is one of the most versatile foods, as there are so many ways that pretzels are enjoyed.

11 substantial – significant

12 rank – level; position



1. Circle the choice that has the same meaning as the following sentence from the lesson:
“beloved in the eyes of many people”

- A. used by lots of people
- B. healthy for lots of people’s eyes
- C. well-liked by lots of people
- D. difficult for lots of people

2. Circle the vocabulary word that best fits the sentence:

When I invented this gadget, I had not thought of all the (varieties, versatile) ways in which it can be used!

3. Number the following steps of the pretzel-making process in the order in which they take place.

- ___ The ingredients are mixed together.
- ___ The pretzels are immersed in a lye bath.
- ___ The pretzels are sprinkled with salt crystals.
- ___ The pretzels are baked twice.
- ___ The pretzel design is stamped into a square of dough.

4. Mark each statement as F (fact) or O (opinion).

- ___ Pretzel manufacturing in America began in Pennsylvania.
- ___ Salted pretzels taste much better than the unsalted variety.
- ___ Pretzel factories should go back to hand-twisting their pretzels.
- ___ America is one of the only countries where people eat hard, crunchy pretzels.

5. Which of the following statements best summarizes the lesson?

- A. The lesson discusses the origin of pretzels, the steps of the pretzel-making process, and the varieties of pretzels available around the world.
- B. The lesson discusses the complex process of making pretzels and adds variation of recipes and styles that are available.
- C. The lesson discusses how pretzels are made and the difference between American pretzels and pretzels in the U.K.
- D. The lesson discusses the history of pretzels and encourages readers to try different types of pretzels and come up with new recipes to sell.

6. Consider the author’s statement that pretzels have been eaten for a very long time. What evidence does the author offer to support this statement?

7. Which sentence does the author use to express the fact that pretzels are a popular food?

8. How does the paragraph starting with, “Next up—bath time!” help the author develop the topic?
