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### For Chocolate Lovers

By Sondra Barrett, PhD.

Just reading the word chocolate makes me drool - what about you? No other confection elicits such passion, such desire, and such unbridled consumption. We Americans eat an average of 11 pounds each year trailing far behind the chocoholics of the world, the Swiss who enjoy 22 pounds. Those numbers are averages so a lot of us are munching a whole lot more than 11 pounds of chocolate. How much do you devour?



Before reading on, get more into a chocolate mood by making yourself a warm cup of deep, rich cocoa or open a piece of your favorite chocolate, only then can you begin...

What is it about chocolate that entices us, attracts our attention and our taste buds?

First of all, let's talk about renewal. Not only do we have a totally sensual experience with a mouthful of melting chocolate but also the sweet indulgence energizes and changes our mood. Chocolate - an anti-depressant?

#### A Taste (or Two or Three) of Chocolate

When moderation was a foreign concept to me, I lived two short, dreamy blocks from a See's Candies store in San Francisco. All I had to do was pass it by, but I didn't. I would go in, buy a chunk or two and I was good for a few more blocks, at least.

Now I've graduated to some moderation and gourmet chocolates - a tiny piece may cost two dollars, but it's worth it. **From the multi-billion dollar industry and the growing number of fine chocolatiers, obviously I am not the only one looking for handcrafted premium chocolates.**

The connoisseur's choice is dark or bittersweet chocolates; these contain at least 35 percent cocoa or chocolate liquor. Milk chocolate, still the preferred confection of most Americans, contains a minimum of 10 percent. The higher the percentage of chocolate, the more intense the chocolate flavor, but it's also less sweet. And white chocolate is not chocolate at all. It contains only the cocoa butter, no chocolate solids. Never give a die-hard chocolate lover white chocolate.

My favorite has always been dark, bittersweet, semi-sweet chocolate. What's yours? What was your best or most current chocolate experience? Were you by yourself or did you share a treat with another chocolate lover? Is enjoying chocolate a solitary experience or one we share with others?

#### A Do-it-Yourself Chocolate Tour - San Francisco

When visiting San Francisco to explore chocolate, a perfect place to stay is the fabulous Harbor Court Hotel, a stone's throw from the Ferry Building. **On the lively Embarcadero facing the bay, all you need to do is walk across the street to enter chocolate and food heaven.**

At the Ferry Building you not only have the chocolatiers, you have fabulous organic fare, unusual mushrooms, all sorts of prepared food delights, chocolate pastries and rich gelato.

**And if you still need another chocolate experience, get over to Ghiradelli Square, a tourist attraction built on the grounds of the famed chocolate factory.** Ice cream fantasies and candies can be enjoyed in the Ghiradelli Chocolate Factory at the corner of the square. Chocolate-loving Bay Area residents are known for

taking their children there, even on a foggy, wet and cold day for a fabulously gooey hot fudge sundae. They are also known to show up alone.

Next time we'll look at chocolate travels, chocolate for lovers and mood-changing chocolate. In future articles, we'll explore chocolate therapy, one psychotherapist's claims that our chocolate-eating habits tell about our personalities as lovers. We'll also touch on wine and chocolate, chocolate rituals, recipes, unusual uses and much more.

Until then, here are some fabulous sites to enhance your chocolate education and purchases. And you can always send me chocolate.

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**Chocolate links:**

[www.scharffenberger.com](http://www.scharffenberger.com)

Tour its factory in Berkeley, and visit its new Café Cacao. Also check out the new chocolate perfume.

[www.recchiuticonfections.com](http://www.recchiuticonfections.com)

Shop for its fine chocolates, or sign up for its newsletter.

[www.valrhona.com](http://www.valrhona.com)

Here's my son's favorite and the first company to label % chocolate on their delicious bars, made in France.

[www.echocolates.com](http://www.echocolates.com)

Discover the terroir of chocolate from different regions of the world with Michel Cluizel's tasting kits of pure origins and single plantation chocolates.

[www.godiva.com](http://www.godiva.com)

Godiva's the largest premium chocolate maker in the world.

[www.cadburylearningzone.co.uk](http://www.cadburylearningzone.co.uk)

This is a fabulous informative site that includes school curricula in math, nutrition, and history, based on chocolate.

[www.exploratorium.edu/chocolate](http://www.exploratorium.edu/chocolate)

Here's another great site for the science and history of chocolate.

[www.chocolat.com/page.asp?id=3](http://www.chocolat.com/page.asp?id=3)

Is chocolate better than sex?

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