COMMENT

The materials science of pleasure

Understanding the behavior of chocolate is a materials science problem and, as usual, the key is the structure-property relationship.

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In the 1980s there was a TV advert in the UK featuring a woman having a terrific time in a bath. I was young at the time, and baths did not fill me with the kind of delight that this woman was experiencing. For me, baths were functional, usually slightly cold, and only occasionally jolly when I was allowed to bring along my toy submarine. The woman on the TV didn’t have toys of any kind but instead was equipped with some confectionary. Nevertheless, every time she put some of it into her mouth, waves of contentment seemed to flow over her that would then overflow into the purest pleasure. I realized that I had never experienced this kind of emotion, let alone in a bath. So began my fascination with chocolate.

My experiments to reproduce such pleasure were dealt early blows, first by the severe rationing of chocolate in my life, and then by the moratorium my mother placed on the eating of my meager chocolate. It was not until I was much older that my mother placed on the eating of my meager chocolate in my life, and then by the moratorium dealt early blows, first by the severe rationing of chocolate in my life, and then by the moratorium de...