

What is Chocolate?

Where does chocolate come from?

Chocolate is from a small evergreen tree *Theobroma cacao* which is grown in the Tropics. The pods are harvested, then the seeds and flesh are dried. The dried seeds (beans) are then shipped to chocolate makers around the world, who roast and grind them. The Cacao bean does not contain dairy, gluten or any of the #Top14 allergens.

Chocolate production will vary, dependent on what is added to create the flavours for the different brands of chocolate bars. It is the added ingredients that can cause concern to the Free-From customers.

Ingredients such as soya or sunflower lecithin, palm oil, whey powder from milk, nuts, artificial flavourings such as vanillin can be added to give a specific flavour. When purchasing chocolate, it is important to read the small print and check all ingredients and note *May Contains* ingredients!

What is lecithin and why is it used in chocolate?

As a liquid, lecithin is a fatty substance derived from soybeans, sunflower, or rapeseed. It is an emulsifier and in the case of chocolate, it binds the cocoa solids, sugar and milk so that they stick to the cocoa butter.

It is a crucial ingredient in chocolate as it reduces viscosity, improves its flow properties, and extends its shelf life. While this can be done with other fats and oils, it takes less lecithin to achieve the same result.

Soya Lecithin is the most commonly used, it is the highest yielding source of lecithin, extracted from the soybean oil, which is highly processed.

As soya is an allergen for some people, Free-From chocolate usually contains lecithin from sunflower seeds.

Sunflower lecithin behaves in a very similar way to its soya counterpart and is more popular than rapeseed lecithin which contains trans-fatty acids in the erucic oil of the seed.

Lecithin will be found in most regular dark chocolate, as well as in milk and white chocolate.

Lecithin helps to keep the production costs down and it's an advantage for a chocolatier wishing to create thin chocolate shells or coatings. A lower viscosity makes chocolate easier to temper, so it is easier to work with during the production process.

Soy lecithin is it harmless?

Soya lecithin is derived from highly processed soya bean oil and is classed as a food additive, typically the oil does not contain sufficient soy protein (100-500 ppm) to cause allergic reactions. However, as soya lecithin is not completely protein-free, some individuals who are allergic to soy may still have a reaction.

Generally, chocolate with higher amounts of cocoa solids (above 70%) do not contain lecithin.

Why do many Dairy-Free chocolate products state "May Contain" (MC) Milk?

Dark chocolates can be naturally dairy-free; however, it is very common for dark chocolate to be made on shared lines with milk chocolate, and chocolate containing tree nuts and peanuts etc. This means that there is a potential high risk of cross contamination with dairy, tree nuts or peanut proteins from the production process.

"May Contain" labels are currently voluntary from manufacturers, however if a FHS customer is highly sensitive or severely allergic to traces of dairy, then they will avoid 'May Contains'. Hospitality providers should always do their own due diligence to provide accurate *May Contains* information and label as appropriate on their allergen matrices for recipes.