

Pockets of Pleasure Episode 6 - Transcript

Hello and welcome to this week's episode of Pockets of Pleasure.

Last week we explored our sense of smell and I dished out some tough love, all in the name of protecting and nurturing your olfactory system - if you missed it do go and listen, because each of these episodes is slowly but surely building into something bigger - that multi pocketed technicolour dream coat of pleasure that I talked about in episode 1.

This week is dedicated to my favourite sense... taste! We're going to bust some myths and uncover some fascinating secrets about this sense that, I hope, will excite you and have you itching to do something you were probably told not to do as a child... I'm going to encourage you to play with your food!

Let's tuck in!

One of the least understood aspects of the sense of taste is that it doesn't happen only in your mouth!

Incredibly, a measly 5% of our sense of taste is down to our mouths.

What makes up the other 95% then? Well, approximately 10% comes from our ears (yes, really), 20% from our eyes and between 70-90% is thanks to our dear old olfactory system aka our nose. If you're doing the maths and thinking these figures don't quite add up, you'd be right - these are ball park figures that allow for the fact that our senses all work in their own unique ways, plus, if we have missing or weakened senses, others will be heightened to compensate for them, but it gives you a pretty good overview.

Given the enormous role our nose plays in taste, perhaps you'll understand another of the important reasons why we ought to take the care of your olfactory system seriously.

Another curious thing about taste is that it has a hereditary aspect - you really can inherit a taste for particular foods from your ancestors!

It was generally believed (I don't know about you, but I was certainly taught this at school) that our tongues can detect four tastes and that each of those can only be picked up by specific areas of the tongue - you might be familiar with what's known as the tongue map (I'll pop a picture in the show notes). But this is a myth! Our tongues, like the rest of our sense organs, are

so much more complex than that.

This idea of 4 tastes - sweet, sour, salty and bitter - is another myth. Scientists in Japan identified a fifth taste - umami - in 2002, and this has now become part of the foodie's lexicon. But not so well known, yet, are the possible 6th and 7th tastes:

oleogustus and kokumi

Oleogustus refers to the taste and mouth sensation of fat, whilst komumi is more of a taste heightening feeling found in certain fermented and aged foods.

All of this is perhaps taking it a step too far into the realms of food science, but I wanted to mention it because it shows us how incredibly complex we are, and makes getting to know ourselves and our pockets of pleasure a much bigger adventure.

One aspect of taste that is rarely mentioned in that breakdown of the involvement of our senses is touch. Of course there's an element of touch involved in getting food into your mouth, but what I'm talking about here is the sense of touch that your tongue is involved with. We tend to think of touch as something that we do with our fingers, and consider our fingertips as highly sensitive instruments, but when compared to the sensitivity of our tongue our fingertips might as well be wearing several pairs of gloves!

In my previous business I was a chocolatier - I didn't just make chocolates from premade couverture chocolate, I was an artisan bean to bar chocolatier. It was through this work that I learnt how insanely sensitive our tongue is. Our taste buds are approximately 20 microns in size - that is TINY! When you make chocolate if it contains particles that are 20 microns or above, it is going to feel gritty on the tongue, which completely ruins the silky smooth sensation we expect from chocolate. Your fingers can't pick up this level of detail, but your tongue can tell straight away.

In the same way that synthetic scents can deaden your ability to detect subtle aromas, highly processed foods can have a similar affect on the papillae in your mouth. The papillae (those little bumpy bits on your tongue) are what we mistakenly think of as our taste buds, but our actual taste buds are contained within the papillae - when you consider that we have between 2000 and 10000 taste buds, you begin to understand how tiny they are!

Now the great thing about taste buds is that they change! It's estimated that they are replaced by new ones every 10 days, which is a significant bit of info if you're trying to create healthier food habits because, whilst genetics unarguably play a part in our taste perception, we can

retrain our sense of taste if we persevere for a relatively short amount of time.

As an example: as a child my grandma trained my taste buds to enjoy 4 sugars and full fat milk in my tea! Today I drink my tea black and without sugar. Now I can't stomach tea if it's been stirred with a spoon that's been in a cup of tea with milk in it first, but to be fair I am what is known as a super taster, so that might not be a common experience. But it just goes to show how much we can change our tastes if we want to.

I'm dying to dig even deeper into the science of taste, but as this isn't The Food Science Podcast I'll leave it there for today. If I've whetted your appetite and you want me to take a deeper dive, let me know and I'll write a blog post or maybe do another podcast on the topic.

Right now though, let's switch our attention and enjoy a little burst of sound therapy.

When we come back I'm going to shift the focus onto the role sound plays in taste- I'll be sharing some interesting snippets about how packaging impacts our enjoyment of certain foods and we'll give a quick mention to misophonia before thinking about where we can start hunting out some tasty pockets of pleasure in this werk's pocket challenge.

See you in just a minute.

Music

Welcome back

How much do you notice about the sounds your food makes? Have you ever thought about how the sound affects your enjoyment or your expectations?

Let's think for a minute about a bar of chocolate - what difference to your expectation of enjoyment does breaking a bar that makes a satisfying snap have vs a bar that breaks quietly? If you've not noticed this before, consider this permission (if you need it!!) to go and experiment!

For me, a bar that doesn't snap signals a disappointing experience, either because it's a poorly made bar or, most likely with industrially produced chocolate, because it's just that bit too warm. One of the reasons chocolate is so pleasurable to us is because it starts to melt at body temperature, so our tongue experiences that thrilling change of sensations, but if the chocolate is too warm, we miss out on part of that experience and we feel disappointed as a result.

Ok let's think about another food where sound impacts our enjoyment - crisps.

Crisps - even the name tells us what to expect doesn't it?

There's nothing worse than a slightly soft crisp - biting into one and being met with.... nothing we expect that crunch and when it's not there we know this is not a fresh product. Our heart sinks a little because our expectations haven't been met. We know we've got a substandard product; It's stale, can't be improved upon and is most likely headed straight for the bin. It's not our taste buds that are ruining this experience for us, it's our ears - remember that they affect twice as much of the taste experience as our mouths do!

What's even more curious about the case of the crunchy crisp is that it's also about the sound the packaging makes! I kid you not! There are scientists whose job it is to create crisp packets with just the right amount of rustle! The louder the crinkle and rustle of the packet, the greater our enjoyment - we can even be tricked into perceiving the crisps as being crunchier!

There was one brand who took this too far though. They created a packet that was SO noisy that eventually it had to be discontinued as they'd had so many complaints.

Whilst all of this seems like harmless fun, it can have serious consequences. The fact that companies creating new food products first discover which sounds are most pleasing, should ring alarm bells. Our senses are being manipulated by big business, in the name of profit, every single day. Is it any wonder that so many of us are addicted to unhealthy foods when they've been created with addictive pleasurable qualities in mind from the get go? How can a home made, more natural food compare to one that's been flavour enhanced let alone 'sonically enhanced'?

I feel a bit like the grinch right now - last week I spoiled your enjoyment of synthetic fragrances and this week I'm coming for your food pleasures! It's really not my intention to spoil the small pleasures of life, quite the opposite! I want you to have the knowledge to own your own unique pleasures, rather than being at the mercy of manipulation tactics. And, what's more, if you continue to eat all those things, you can increase your enjoyment of them by being more aware of what you're experiencing. And, if you decide to change things, you know that you get a new set of taste buds in just 10 days. Win win, right? The hardest part about changing our tastes is to do with our psychology. So often, when we decide to create new habits, it's the memory of a feeling that a certain thing gives us that draws us back to old habits, not the thing itself. This is why, so often, when we've been craving something all week and we finally give in to the temptation, it can leave us feeling disappointed. I do this all the time! I don't eat sweets all week, then on Friday my husband brings home some chocolate or a bag of haribo and I can't wait to

shovel them into my mouth. 9 times out of 10 though, the enjoyment of the anticipation outweighs the experience (as we discussed in episode 1) and I'm left feeling disappointed and a little hollow. But I keep on repeating the same mistake week after week.

There is a way to break this cycle, and it's what accounts for that 1 time in 10 where I really enjoy my Friday night treats. But more on that after the break as it's part of this week's pocket challenge.

Before that a quick mention of misophonia.

Misophonia is the name given to, what I would call, a heightened sensitivity to certain sounds. It can result in anything from mild irritation to a full blown fight or flight response. It's particularly common around the sound of others eating and can make sharing meals an excruciating experience. Just one more way sound can play a part in your taste experience! There are now special ear plugs that can help to reduce the effects of misophonia (I'll pop a link in the show notes) but you can also try playing music when eating in company, and changing your seating position can also help.

Many people think misophonia is a silly affliction, but for its sufferers (and their loved ones) it can have a huge impact - the experience of sharing meals is such an important part of our human culture that, if you find it a triggering experience, can really limit your social experiences and create a sense of disconnection that can destroy relationships.

Did you have any idea that that we would talk so much about the effects of sound in a podcast about taste?

It just goes to show how incredibly complex and interrelated our senses are, doesn't it? This is why, when I came up with the concept of The Sensory Coach, I knew it was the key to bringing together all of the seemingly disparate aspects of my passions and expertise. I absolutely love it, and I wholeheartedly believe that gaining a deeper understanding of our own unique sensory system is the key to creating the life of your dreams.

Right, time for another quick break and then we'll crack on with this week's pocket challenge.

MUSIC

Welcome back - let's get straight into this week's Pocket Challenge.

This week I've got a two pronged challenge for you.

You're going to be exploring mindful eating whilst becoming a taste detective.

If you recall, I mentioned that maybe 1 in every 10 of my Friday night treat experiences really hits the spot for me. There are two reasons for this:

The first is novelty. When my husband surprises me with sweets that I'm not expecting, and haven't had in a while, I enjoy them much more. It's something different, a break from the routine, a fresher experience for my taste buds.

The second is eating my treats mindfully. Making the decision to slow down, to savour the flavours and all of the sensory sensations I'm experiencing. Choosing to eat like this makes enjoyment possible even without novelty.

Now I'm sure there are some highly enlightened and evolved humans who can eat like this all of the time, but I'm not one of them. To be honest, I think the shine would wear off pretty quickly because it would become your normal, every day experience and, whether we like it or not, our need for novelty is a key human driver.

It would also mean we'd have to have French length lunch breaks and, whilst that could be wonderful, who really has time for that these days?

No, I am not going to suggest you engage in mindful eating at each and every meal, though of course if that feels like something you want to try, go for it. I'm going to suggest something much more doable - eat one breakfast, one lunch, one dinner and one snack or treat mindfully each week. You might choose to do that all in one day, but my suggestion would be to spread those meals out across the week - you've guessed it; creating little pockets of pleasure.

When you begin eating more mindfully, you're naturally going to become a taste detective, as you'll be noticing the flavours, textures, sounds and smells as part of that mindfulness, which is why I suggested you pick 4 different eating experiences as it'll give you a wider spectrum of tastes to explore. But, what you can also do in your role of detective is to be on the look out for the feelings that various tastes trigger in you throughout the week.

This might seem a lot, but, if you approach it in the same way you have the other hunts for pockets of pleasure, it will start to become second nature after a little while. The point of all of this is to get to know yourself better, so that you can create a life that's more in tune with your personal needs, desires and preferences, rather than being pulled along by the never ending profit targets of the manipulators and marketers. My hope for you is that, through the

philosophy of pockets of pleasure, you'll discover how to create a life that brings you real, deeply satisfying joy.

You might find it helpful to use a journal to really explore this week's challenge, as many of these sensations we're seeking can be fleeting and easily forgotten.

Ok, that's it for this episode. As always, I love to hear how you're getting on, you can find me on instagram @thesensorycoach or use the hashtag TSCPockets to share your experiences.

In the next episode I'm going to be looking at how we can use personal rituals to enrich our lives.

I hope you have a wonderful week filled with lots of blissful taste experiences.

Bye for now.