

Why do pear drops smell like nail varnish?

From the sweeties.net wiki

If you have ever thought pear drops smell like nail varnish, or nail varnish remover smells like pear drops, you are not imagining it. They share a chemical.

The chemical: ethyl acetate

Pear drops usually get their flavour from two esters, a family of chemicals that often smell fruity. One is isoamyl acetate, which tastes of banana. The other is ethyl acetate, which tastes of pear.

Ethyl acetate is a colourless liquid with a sweet smell, and it is often described as smelling similar to pear drops. It is made by combining ethanol with acetic acid, and it is produced on a huge scale. As well as flavouring sweets, it is used as a solvent in glues and nail varnish removers, and even in the process used to take the caffeine out of some tea and coffee.

So when you smell nail varnish remover that contains ethyl acetate and think of pear drops, your nose is quite right. It is the same molecule.

Is it safe?

Yes. Ethyl acetate occurs naturally in fruit and gives a brief, fruity aroma. In sweets it is used in tiny amounts as a flavouring. The fact that the same chemical is also used as a solvent in other products does not make it unsafe in food, any more than vinegar is unsafe because it is also used for cleaning. What matters is the use and the amount.

Not every nail varnish remover uses ethyl acetate, and not every pear drop is made the same way: some use natural pear juice concentrate for flavour instead.

Why the smell is so memorable

Smell is closely tied to memory. For people who grew up with a sweet jar of pear drops, the smell means the corner shop. For others it means painting nails. The smell is the same; the memory decides whether you love it or hate it.

The banana twist

The other pear drop flavouring, isoamyl acetate, is sometimes called banana oil or pear oil. It is used to give a banana flavour to sweets and gum, including the American Juicy Fruit chewing gum. So there is a little bit of banana in most pear drops.

Read more about the sweet itself in [pear drops](#), or try our [SW033](#).

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