

Why is Kendal Mint Cake called a cake?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Kendal Mint Cake is a peppermint flavoured slab of sugar from Kendal in Cumbria. It has no flour or eggs and is not baked, so the name can seem odd. But in English, cake has not always meant sponge.

What cake used to mean

The word cake came into English from the Old Norse kaka. When it first appears, in the early 13th century, it meant a flat or fairly thin mass of baked dough. By the middle of the 15th century it had broadened to mean any flat, rounded mass. The sense we know best today, a light mixture of flour, sugar, butter and other ingredients baked in any form, grew up alongside it.

So a cake could be a flat, rounded mass of almost anything, and that is the sense in the name Kendal Mint Cake. It is a cake because of its shape, not because of how it is made.

Mint cake before Kendal

Kendal Mint Cake is based on an older, traditional sweet known as mint cake, peppermint tablet and various other names. Tablet, from Scotland, is another sugary confection that is allowed to crystallise: see [what is the difference between fudge and tablet?](#)

The Kendal version has an origin story, though it is unproven. In 1869, the tale goes, Joseph Wiper, who had married into the Thompson family of Kendal confectioners, left a boiled solution meant for glacier mints overnight. By morning it had turned cloudy and set solid, and the result was mint cake. Wiper began making it, and several other Kendal confectioners followed.

Cakes of liquorice too

Mint cake is not the only British sweet named for its shape. Pontefract cakes are small, roughly circular discs of black liquorice, originally made in Pontefract in West Yorkshire, about 19 mm wide and 4 mm thick. They are cakes in exactly the same old sense: flat, rounded pieces: see [why is liquorice called Spanish?](#)

The explorers' cake

Whatever its name, mint cake became known as an energy food. Robert Wiper, who took over the family firm after Joseph emigrated to Canada in 1912, promoted it as an energy food for expeditions, including Sir Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans Antarctic Expedition, and it became popular with mountaineers and hikers: see [Kendal Mint Cake](#)

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