

How are candy canes made?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Candy canes are peppermint stick candy bent into the shape of a cane, usually white with red stripes, and linked with Christmas since at least the 1870s. The first ones were made entirely by hand. Big makers now run them down an automated line, and the order of the steps holds a few surprises.

The factory line

The National Confectioners Association, the American trade body for sweet makers, describes the process like this:

1. **Cook.** Sugar and corn syrup are heated in large kettles and then vacuum cooked.
2. **Cool and flavour.** The candy is poured onto a cooling table, where peppermint and starch are added.
3. **Knead.** A kneader works everything together until the candy turns a golden brown colour.
4. **Pull.** A puller turns the candy silky white.
5. **Form.** A batch former shapes it into a log.
6. **Stripe.** The stripes are formed on a heating table and placed on the white log.
7. **Roll and size.** The log is rolled into a cone, and sizing wheels bring it down to the diameter of a candy cane, turning it into a rope.
8. **Twist.** A twister gives the rope its barber pole stripes.
9. **Cut and wrap.** A cutter snips the candy into sticks, which are wrapped while still warm, so the heat of the candy shrinks the wrappers.
10. **Crook.** Finally a crooker bends each wrapped stick into its hook.

Why pull the candy?

Pulling stretches the candy and folds it back on itself, trapping tiny air bubbles. That lowers its density and makes it opaque, which is how golden candy turns white. Humbugs and seaside rock are pulled for the same reason: see [how are humbugs made?](#) and [how is seaside rock made?](#)

Stripes built in

The stripes are not painted on. Coloured candy is laid on the white log while it is soft, and as the log is rolled thinner the stripes shrink with it. The twister then turns them into a spiral. It is a version of caneworking, the old craft behind millefiori glass: see [how do they get the stripes in candy canes?](#)

The hook came last

Hand work once limited how many canes could be made. Robert McCormack, who began making candy canes in Albany, Georgia, in 1919, had to have them bent by hand as they came off the line, and breakage often ran at more than 20 per cent. In 1957 his brother in law, Gregory Harding Keller, a Roman Catholic priest, patented the Keller Machine, which automated the twisting of soft candy into spiral stripes and cut it into precise lengths. On today's line, the crooker comes after the wrapper.

Stick candy, the straight cousin

Before it was a cane, it was a stick. A recipe for straight peppermint candy sticks, white with coloured stripes, was published in 1844, and the earliest known mention of a candy cane comes in a story of 1866. American stick candy is still made by mixing sugar, sometimes with corn syrup, with water and a little cream of tartar, colouring and flavouring the dough, then drawing and twisting it into a spiral, cutting it to length and letting it cool and harden. For the same kind of sweet on a stick, see [how are lollipops made?](#)

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