

How are Pontefract cakes made?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Pontefract cakes, once called Pomfret cakes, are small, roughly round black liquorice sweets, about 19 mm across and 4 mm thick. They take their name from Pontefract in West Yorkshire, where liquorice was grown and made into cakes for centuries: see [Pontefract cakes](#)

Step one: the liquorice extract

The flavour comes from liquorice root. Haribo, which makes Pontefract cakes today, describes the first stage: the roots are dried, grated and boiled in water, and the black mass that results is cast into rock hard blocks of about 5 kg. At the factory, the blocks are cut up and dissolved in hot water. Haribo says its liquorice products need to contain at least 3 per cent liquorice extract: see [how is liquorice made?](#)

Pontefract once grew its own. By the late 19th century, though, demand had outgrown the town's liquorice gardens, and its 12 liquorice firms relied mainly on extract imported largely from Turkey.

Step two: the paste

The extract is cooked with sugars and starches into a thick black paste. Haribo's own ingredient list for its Pontefract Cakes, as shown on its website in September 2026, reads: treacle, glucose syrup, sugar, starch, caramelised sugar syrup, wheat flour, gelatine, liquorice extract at 4.5 per cent, salt, sunflower oil and a glazing agent, beeswax.

Step three: the stamp in the starch

Haribo deposits the cooked black mass into a starch tray that has been pressed with the impression of the Pontefract cake, then leaves it to stand and cure for several days. It is the same starch moulding method used for fruit gums and jellies: see [what is starch moulding?](#)

The cakers

It was not always done this way. The cakes used to be embossed one by one with a hand stamp by workers known as cakers, who could each produce upwards of 30,000 a day. The stamp was a stylised Pontefract Castle with a raven on the top bar, a design thought to have been used for almost 400 years. A stamp with the initials GS was in use by 1612, thought to stand for Sir George Savile, a local landowner. Today the cakes are usually formed by machine.

A liquorice warning

Liquorice contains glycyrrhizin, and too much of it can be harmful. In 2004 a woman was admitted to hospital with dangerously low potassium after eating about 200 g of Pontefract cakes a day, and that year the European Commission recommended limiting glycyrrhizic acid to 100 mg a day or less: see [liquorice and blood pressure](#)

Allergens

Haribo's recipe contains wheat flour, so it is not gluten free, and gelatine, so it is not vegetarian. Other makers' recipes differ: see [wheat in sweets](#) and [gelatine in sweets explained](#)

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