Not Just Sugar on a Stick - How Lollipops Are Made

Oh, the sweet stickiness of a lollipop! It brings back memories of a trip to the bank or doctor's office, trading your sour apple for a grape, or licking a gigantic rainbow-colored delight at the county fair. Whether your favorite is the sour apple or the grape, the ones with the bubble gum or chocolate roll inside, or if you prefer a plain ol' red cherry all-day-sucker, how that sweet, sticky treat got on that stick is all the same. There may be a hundred flavors of lollipop to eat, but there's really only one way to make them. Let's follow along as our friend, Lolly, is born. Step One: Sugar Water The first step in lollipop manufacturing is to create the sugar water that is the base of all lollipops. Most lolly makers manufacture lollipops in such large quantities that as many as 180,000 pounds (that's 90 tons) of dry sugar can be used to create one batch! The sugar arrives at the plant in railroad gondola cars. The cars deposit their sugary loads into 180 F water, where it will dissolve. (This can take a while, as much as 9 hours, so I hope you're not in a hurry.) Once the sugar has completely dissolved, the sugar water heads into a precooker. Step Two: Sugar Corn Syrup The next step in Lolly's creation is the precooker. This is essentially a large set of coils where the next main ingredient in Lolly's make-up is added to the sugar water. Corn syrup arrives at the plant in large tanker trucks and is pumped directly into the precooker. The mix is typically 45% corn syrup and 55% sugar water. This mix is called slurry in the lollipop making trade. Step Three: Slurry Heat The slurry is heated as it travels through the coils into the cooker. Steam heat is typically used in most factories to heat the precooker's coils. As the slurry passes through on its way to the final cooker, the coils and the slurry inside them are heated to around 228 F. Step Four: Slurry More Heat In the final cooker, the slurry is heated under a vacuum to 290 F. The vacuum in the final cooker is essential to Lolly's creation, as it removes all the moisture and heat from the slurry. The intense heat and vacuum process takes all of about 4 minutes to complete. Lolly and 150 pounds of his dearest lollipop friends can be heated all at once in most final cookers. Step Five: Slurry Flavor Mixing Just before the final mix, Lolly receives his color and his flavor. Most likely citric acid or malic acid will be added, too. Only one flavor of lollipops can be made at any one time, so I do hope Lolly is one of your favorites. The flavors and colors that go into the lollipops are premeasured and hand-mixed, to ensure that Lolly tastes just exactly as he should. The citric acid helps enhance the flavor of citrus-flavored candies, like orange or lemon or lime, and also cuts some of the lollipop's sweetness. Malic acid serves to do the same for non-citrus flavors, like cherry or chocolate. Both acids are extremely important to the lollipop-making process and the flavor of our friend Lolly just wouldn't be the same if either was left out. After the color and flavor and acid have been added to the batch, the mixer begins its duties. Two large arms stir and lift the candy, almost as if mimicking the motions of a baker kneading dough. This kneading action removes heat and air from the candy. Lolly's creation isn't an entirely mechanical one, as the candy can not leave the mixer unless it has been sampled by a gloved human hand. This hands-on approach ensures that the candy is at the right consistency and temperature before being sent through the extrusion process, Step Five: Candy Roller Sizer Lolly and his friends have to undergo a good deal of stretching and pulling before they take on their recognizable lollipop shape. The Rollers are large cones through which the candy is pulled and stretched into a rope shape. From the roller, the candy goes into the sizer. Here, the candy rope is made smaller, before being sent through the forming machines. Step Six: Candy Stick Lolly is almost ready to become a lollipop, gaining his final shape in the forming machine. The forming machine takes in the candy rope, flattens it and forms it into the lollipop's final shape. The forming machine also gives the lollipops their most distinctive feature - their stick! The forming machine is capable of creating 1,000 Lollys every minute. Talk about your large families! From the forming machine, the lollipops go into a cooling drum. The drum is essentially a large rotating cylinder that allows air to reach the lollipops and cool them to room temperature. From the cooling drum, Lolly and his friends are on their way to the final stop in their creation - the wrapper and bagger. Step Seven: Lollipop Packaging The final step in the lollipop manufacturing process is the packaging. Here, the lollipops are dropped into wrapping machine. The wrapper puts the paper or cellophane wrappers on the lollipops' tops. Lolly will look o good in his new headgear, don't you think? After being wrapped, the lollipops are moved on to the bagger or boxer. The bagged or boxed lollipops are then ready for shipment to the retailers. All that's left for Lolly is to be purchased by some lucky new owner! Some companies buy the sticks for their lollipops, while others make their own. If Lolly's company made his, it was probably made during the same time period that he was created. Large rolls of paper are cut into strips 2 1/2 inches wide and 15 inches long. The strips are then rolled put into a drum where water is added. The wet paper leaves the drum and enters a set of rollers that wind the paper tighter and tighter. When the right stick shape is reached, the strips are cut, dried, and waxed. The wax helps to keep them from dissolving when exposed to human saliva. So, now that we've followed Lolly and his stick through their creation, isn't it time to pay the bank a visit? Be sure to ask for your favorite flavor!

About the Author

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