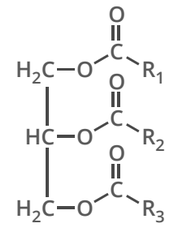
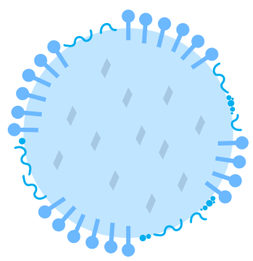
THE CHEMISTRY OF ICE CREAM

Ice cream is a combination of air, ice crystals, fat globules, and a liquid syrup. These are combined to make a colloid, a solution with very small insoluble particles suspended in it. This graphic looks in detail at the components of this colloid, and some molecules that produce ice cream flavours.

FATS, PROTEINS, & EMULSIFIERS



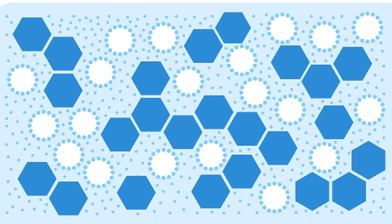
FAT (TRIGLYCERIDE)
R = fatty acids



LIQUID FAT
EMULSIFIER MOLECULES
MILK PROTEINS
FAT CRYSTALS

Fats are important for the creaminess of ice cream. Proteins from milk form a membrane around the fat droplets, making it harder for them to come in contact with each other. Emulsifiers replace some milk protein on the surface of the fat droplet. As ice cream is made, some of the fat in the droplet solidifies, and the fat 'needles' that form help droplets to partially cluster. These clusters, along with milk proteins, help stabilise air bubbles in the ice cream.

THE STRUCTURE OF ICE CREAM



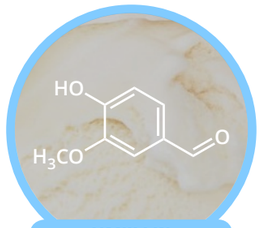
ICE CRYSTALS	30%
AIR BUBBLES	50%
FAT DROPLETS	5%
LIQUID SYRUP	15%

% by volume for typical composition

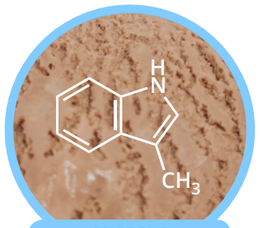
During freezing, most water is frozen into ice. Small ice crystals are needed for smooth ice cream. Beating and aeration occur at the same time as freezing to form small air bubbles, stabilised by de-emulsified fat. Air makes up 30-50% of ice cream's final volume. Sugar sweetens the ice cream, and lowers the freezing point of water, reducing the amount of ice. Soft ice cream contains less ice.

FLAVOURS AND COLOURS

ANTHOCYANINS



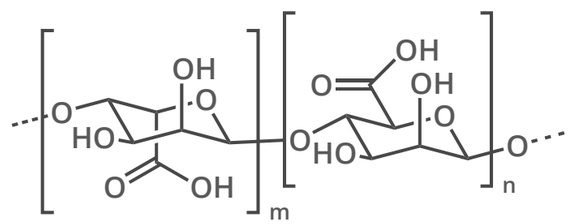
VANILLIN



SKATOLE

Natural ice cream flavours contain a number of flavour-contributing compounds. Flavouring can also be achieved artificially. Artificial vanilla flavouring is often simply vanillin; other artificial flavours are more complex. Other compounds can be used as flavour enhancers – an unusual example is skatole, also found in faeces, but which has a floral odour at lower concentrations. Colours can be added artificially; anthocyanins from plants are amongst the colouring agents used.

STABILISERS



ALGINIC ACID

Sodium alginate is the sodium salt of alginic acid. Another stabiliser that can be obtained from seaweed is carrageenan.

Stabilisers are added in small amounts (~0.2%) to ice cream. Often extracted from plants, a common example is sodium alginate, the sodium salt of alginic acid, extracted from brown seaweeds. Stabilisers reduce the rate at which ice cream melts, add smoothness, and increase the viscosity of the liquid phase of ice cream. Use of multiple stabilisers can produce synergistic effects.