

If you love chocolate - and who doesn't - the holiday season is ripe with opportunities to work in a chocolate break. Chocolate is a delicious treat of many faces and forms. Just because it tastes so wonderful is no reason for guilt. Recent studies have confirmed that chocolate is good for your heart, so if anyone tries to make you feel guilty, simply point your finger to that fact. Then, invite your accuser to join you in a healthful treat.

There's simply nothing like a good chocolate concoction. Chocolate is good for breakfast, lunch or dinner. A chocolate croissant is the perfect accompaniment to a morning cup of coffee. A brownie is a wonderful ending to lunch. Chocolate truffles are elegant after-dinner treats. There is one chocolate treat that seems right at any time of the day, as a pick-me-up, a snack or unctuous evening dessert. This would be chocolate fudge.

If you "google" chocolate fudge, you'll get millions of results, attesting to the popularity of this just dessert. Everyone's got a recipe for this versatile goodie, all of which you may find tempting.

Chocolate fudge brings back memories of Grandma's house at Christmas time, with a big tin of little squares of fudge just waiting to be popped into your mouth, savored and melted with a sigh of great enjoyment.

It seems everyone's Mom or Grandma has the very best fudge recipe. That doesn't mean there's not room for experimentation and new discoveries of chocolate heaven.

Among the basic chocolate fudge ingredients are chocolate (duh!), butter, cream and perhaps sugar if you're using baking chocolate. It's the add-ons that personalize your fudge, making your chocolate fudge sing in the memory of your appreciative recipients.

Add-ons make your fudge distinctive. Try integrating nuts, such as crushed almonds, pecans or walnuts. Get flamboyant with some marshmallow creme. A bit of quality, high cocoa butter chocolate can make your fudge extraordinary. Just a couple tablespoons of liqueur, such as Kahlua, rum or Orange Marnier mixed in with the batch can produce a mysterious and intriguing chocolate fudge, made all your own with a little experimentation and imagination.

Along with a "couverture" quality chocolate, heavy cream lends a sensuous, rich texture and flavor to your chocolate fudge. Butter adds calories, it's true, but the taste overcomes any prudish or guilty complexion to the treat.

Presentation is the final gilding of the lily. Party stores sell small gold and

silver foiled cups to hold the treasured treat. Once prepared, cut the chocolate fudge into tiny bite-sized pieces, set in the foil cups and box them up. Surely you'll have no refusals.