

**Care for a mint?: Sexy new mints serve as an icebreaker and breath freshener in one
Calgary Herald**

Sunday, June 19, 2005

Page: D13

Section: Real Life: Taste

Byline: Barbara Balfour

Source: Calgary Herald

They're not just for masking halitosis anymore. And they're a far cry from the peppermints of old that came wrapped in sticky plastic, dug up from the cavernous insides of your grandmother's handbag.

Today's breath mint comes in unorthodox flavours, such as chocolate birthday cake, green apple and chai tea.

Encased in shiny, eye-catching tins with themes ranging from weddings and new babies to shopaholics and supporters of a free Tibet, the new mint also serves multiple functions.

There are VickiMints, lip-shaped cinnamon mints available at Victoria's Secret that instruct the user to take one or two before kissing. There's Little i peppermints that include a tiny mirror inside the box, perfect for checking if there's anything in between your teeth that might get in the way of totally freshening your breath.

And as smoking is getting increasingly banned in public places, the breath mint is fast taking over as a more fashionable alternative to the cigarette. A social lubricant of sorts, think of the new mint and the tin it comes nestled in as the replacement of the Zippo lighter.

"Instead of lighting someone's cigarette as an icebreaker, you slide the tin open in a sexy fashion and offer them a mint," says Jeremy Kahn, co-owner of the mint-making company, Oral Fixations, whose gourmet mints have been a fixture at the Oscars.

In Calgary, they are available at Quorra Apothecary or online at www.oralfix.com.

"It is something by which you can define yourself socially," adds Kahn. "You pop open the tin to have a mint when you're at the bar and everyone takes notice -- they want to know where you got it from."

Kahn is part of a trio of Ivy League grads who started their own mint-making company at the age of 23.

"(A friend) and I were both working in a wine shop after college, biding our time and figuring out what to do with our lives. I said to him, 'I need to go outside and get a cigarette -- I have an oral fixation,'" Kahn recalls. "He said, 'You know, I must have heard that phrase about 10 times already. We should do something with that.' "

Entrepreneurs like Kahn have tapped into a fast-growing trend that sets itself apart through

the packaging, one that tries to present itself as elegant, sleek and easy to carry around. Unlike a paper gum wrapper or a plastic TicTac container, the tins have a lasting purpose and are recycled by the younger set as handy mini wallets for when they go out clubbing at night.

Still, it's not just about the tin. The product matters, too.

"People will buy it once because of the case, but the repeat buys are because of the mints," says Kahn.

That's why they use high quality ingredients such as natural clove oil and caffeine powder in their chai tea mints and mint and lime oils for their mojito mints.

Despite their tasty ingredients, an important distinction to be made about mints is our bodies respond to them very differently than they do to other treats like candy.

The long-standing popularity of the mint has more to do with the chemical sensation it provokes, rather than a preference for a specific brand or flavour, says Wendy Wismer, a sensory scientist at the University of Alberta.

It's more our nerve endings rather than our taste buds that make us fully appreciate mint's qualities -- and keep reaching for another. And another.

"You don't experience the mint through your nose and olfactory system, so it doesn't tingle the taste buds quite the same way," Wismer explains. "What becomes involved is the chemical system -- otherwise called the trigeminal system, which involves nerve endings that respond to pain all over your body. They can be stimulated through the cooling sensation of mint or the heat of cinnamon."

Mint can also be found in topical pain medications, such as rubs for arthritis. They work because they're giving our pain receptors something else to think about. In the same way, mint lovers appreciate the tingle and distraction of popping a candy in their mouths.

It's also a habit that can be addictive, says Wismer, who adds, "The more you eat, the more you will need in the future to get the same response."

The mint trend is clearly here to stay.