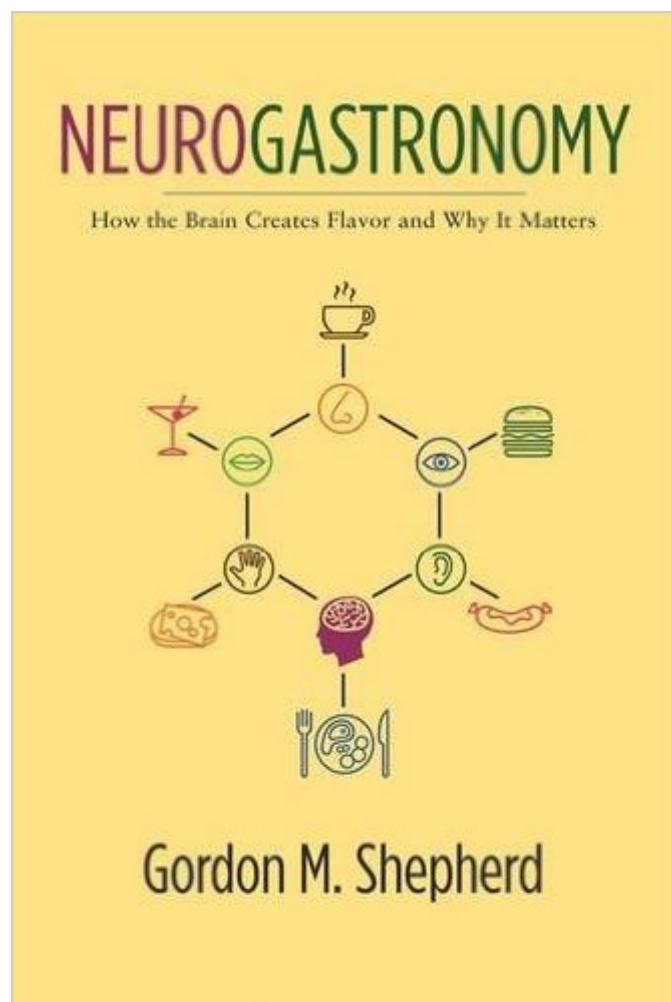


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Neurogastronomy: How The Brain Creates Flavor And Why It Matters



Synopsis

Leading neuroscientist Gordon M. Shepherd embarks on a paradigm-shifting trip through the "human brain flavor system," laying the foundations for a new scientific field: neurogastronomy. Challenging the belief that the sense of smell diminished during human evolution, Shepherd argues that this sense, which constitutes the main component of flavor, is far more powerful and essential than previously believed. Shepherd begins Neurogastronomy with the mechanics of smell, particularly the way it stimulates the nose from the back of the mouth. As we eat, the brain conceptualizes smells as spatial patterns, and from these and the other senses it constructs the perception of flavor. Shepherd then considers the impact of the flavor system on contemporary social, behavioral, and medical issues. He analyzes flavor's engagement with the brain regions that control emotion, food preferences, and cravings, and he even devotes a section to food's role in drug addiction and, building on Marcel Proust's iconic tale of the madeleine, its ability to evoke deep memories. Shepherd connects his research to trends in nutrition, dieting, and obesity, especially the challenges that many face in eating healthily. He concludes with human perceptions of smell and flavor and their relationship to the neural basis of consciousness. Everyone from casual diners and ardent foodies to wine critics, chefs, scholars, and researchers will delight in Shepherd's fascinating, scientific-gastronomic adventures.

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Customer Reviews

What are flavours, how are they created, how do they impact us and does it matter? These are the

key questions addressed by neuroscientist Gordon M. Shepherd in this quite unusual, interesting book. At first glance you may feel this is a fairly typical academic tome, full of top-notch information but barely accessible to the average reader. In this case you would be mistaken. Here the author has managed to create a book that is both accessible but not "dumbed down". You don't need a science degree to enjoy this book but, of course, should you be using it in the course of study you will equally find it of value. Within this book the author seeks to create a new scientific field of study and understanding - neurogastronomy - and debunk the belief that the sense of smell diminished during human evolution. Taking an opposing view, Shepherd claims that our sense of flavour is inherently stronger than previously imagined. The basics of smell are covered from its interaction in the body as well as the "physical mechanics" of how a smell is transformed or processed into a flavour. This might turn a lot of conventional thinking on its head as we are led to believe, or think, that vanilla surely has the same taste to man as it might have to an animal. Once you start reading about this subject and thinking about it, the potential seems almost limitless. Society generally accepts that dogs have a great sense of smell and it appears to be more acute than humans. There are reasons for that. Yet how many people really know that there are many structural, physiological differences. Both noses smell things. Both brains process things, yet the processing "algorithm", for want of a better word, is different. There must be reasons for this. The concepts raised by the author can also explain how flavouring intensity can vary tremendously between people. One could further postulate that different cultures and influences can change the nature and form of the smell/flavour interface. Essentially the book is split into four major parts: noses and smells, making pictures of smells, creating flavour and why it (the overall theme of the book) matters. Within this each small chapter builds upon the knowledge learned and expressed so you can get a quite good, general understanding of this potentially very complex, developed theme. Each chapter is, in itself, quite short and to the point, which probably is an attraction and oddity in its own right (within academic works). There is a lot to say for this style of modular, nugget-sized learning, particularly when the material itself has not been watered down. It is certainly a thought-provoking read, even if for many it is unlikely to be of practical, actionable interest for the average reader. But need that be a bad thing? Sometimes it is great to just get knowledge for knowledge's sake. With this book you get that in spades and get to read a work that has the potential for breaking new ground and developing a whole new direction of study. This reviewer cautiously suggests that you need not have a specific scientific or culinary background to enjoy this book. Even as a 'general reader' it has a lot to offer, even if some of the more detailed material is skipped over. On a scientific level, no comment is possibly, but it certainly appears to provide a conclusive argument. The end of the book is rounded

off with the usual extensive notes, bibliography and index that need no further explanation.

After the decent introduction this book plummets into the black hole of bad science writing. Nothing can save it because Shepherd doesn't really have anything new or cohesive to say about psychology and flavor. Lots of big names are tossed around (McGee, Beauchamp, Wrangham, Sclafani, etc.), but this just makes him and his research feel shallow. A quick look at the puny bibliography shows how little effort Shepherd put into the book. Strangely, reviewers haven't commented on the bad writing, but they have said the book is "a dense read." This didn't turn me off from the book because I don't mind dense reads if the material is necessarily dense. But this book is needlessly dense. Here's a quick example of a sentence: "Just as the muscles of the nostril manipulate the inhalation of air, so are they coordinated to direct the air streams into the snout." (23) What? Why is this written as a parallel sentence? Instead of nostril muscles "manipulating the inhalation of air," can they just breathe in or sniff instead? Are they "coordinated to direct the air streams," or do they just direct the air streams? The book is made up of these sentences, and together with the name dropping, the result is a rambling 200-page lecture given by a pretentious Yale professor. Even more pretentious than Herve This, because although both authors baptize a new field, at least This was French and poorly translated.

I thought this book would have applicable advice, technique and method. This is really a book on olfaction and the neurological reaction to different stimuli. After reading this book if feel I have only learned vocabulary. Although it is drawn out over 27 chapters, this book doesn't cover much that is not rudimentarily understood by watching a toddler plug there nose while eating brussel sprouts. The author is constantly referencing other chapters of this book when a simple one or two line explanation would suffice. He is also not shy on shamelessly mentioning even the smallest role in other scientists studies. Personally, I feel this book could have been a quarter the length and maintained the same amount of pertinent information.

I'm a molecular gastronomy geared chef and read this book to get new insights into ways to manipulate my diners' experiences. I was not disappointed. Shepherd does an excellent job of walking you through each step and train of thought that ultimately gets us to flavor, and yes, it is repetitive as Shepherd writes as I can only assume he teaches classes (start off with a summary, give new material, end with summary), but that repetition was useful for me as a practitioner trying to chew my way through very dense matter. Even some of the most basic knowledge has changed

the way I now cook - for example, I questioned the role of oil based flavors v. water based flavors in extending flavor in my customers as they exhale after each bite. It is not a light read, and certainly not a read for someone with just a passing interest, but for people who want a deep understanding of the interaction between brain, body and food, this certainly will satiate your thirst for the subject.

Very scientific. Very thorough. Might be a bit too nerdy for most people. Definitely written for the neuroscience freak who likes food. For people that curious to know why things work. What is a flavor image. It won't prepare you to cook any differently. It won't help you to win any culinary awards. What it will do, is provide a solid appreciation for the profound miracle that occurs when the perfect bite hits your tongue.

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