

## Lenten Pretzels

Pretzels are a popular snack year-round today, but they first became popular as a Lenten food for Christians in the seventh century. The Catholic Church played a leading role in the early history of the pretzel. Catholics used to have much stricter rules governing fasting and abstinence during Lent. It was a time of strict fasting, only one meal a day and it could not come from an animal or be sweet. No candy, meat, dairy or eggs were to be eaten. Meals were supposed to be uncomplicated. Pretzels were made of a simple mixture of water, flour and salt, thus an ideal food to consume during Lent. They were actually only available during the Lenten Season, appearing on Ash Wednesday and disappearing after Easter.



The first pretzels were baked by monks and were a soft, squishy bread similar to the soft pretzels of today. The word Pretzel is derived from the Latin “bracellae,” meaning “little arms.” The twisted shape of pretzel was meant to resemble two arms crossed in prayer, which was a traditional way to pray. The German word “pretiolas” which means “little rewards” is thought to also have influenced the naming of the modern pretzel because German monks would give pretzels to their students who properly recited their prayers, as well as to the townspeople who were impoverished and hungry.

By the 17th century, the interlocking loops of the pretzel had come to symbolize undying love as well. Couples would tear apart a pretzel to seal the marriage bond (kind of like a wishbone). The bigger half represented prosperity within the marriage. This custom may have been the origin of the phrase “tying the knot.”

This Lent let us allow the pretzel to remind us to Pray, Fast and to Give of ourselves to others and God. Cross your arms in the traditional fashion (like the monks) and pray:

Dear God, we ask you to bless these pretzels which we are about to eat.  
Each time we eat them may we be reminded that this is the season of Lent, a time of prayer.  
Help us to remember to pray for those who need our prayers each day.  
Keep your loving arms around us, O God, to protect us.  
In Christ' name  
Amen.