

WHY ONIONS CAUSE TEARS

Have you ever started to cry while cutting onions? The National Onion Association provides an explanation of why onions bring on your tears.

Onions contain the chemical sulfur, as well as enzymes that speed up chemical reactions. The sulfur and the enzymes rest on opposite sides of the onions' cell walls-until they are cut open. Then the sulfur and enzymes come in contact and start a chain of chemical reactions. New molecules float up in the air and react with the nerve cell membrane of the eye to form sulfuric acid and cause tearing. While you can't see these reactions, you can feel the results when your eyes start to burn and water.

To prevent tearing, chill onions for about 30 minutes before cutting them. The chemical reaction will be slowed down by the lower temperature. Another strategy to try is cutting the onion with a sharp knife. When you do this, less damage will occur to the onion's cells and fewer of the tear-producing compounds will be released. Finally, be sure to cut the root end of the onion last, as it contains the largest concentration of the sulfuric compounds. For more information about onions, visit www.onions-usa.org.