



CHOCOLATE FOR YOUR HEALTH

Its true! The good news about chocolate is that it's good for your health. The bad news is that you can't have too much!

Now you can replace those cakes, ice creams and sticky buns with healthy dark chocolate as your treat because of its significant health benefits. The darker the chocolate the better. That's because it contains more cocoa which contains flavonoids – these have antioxidant qualities that benefit health. Other foods that contain flavonoids include fruit, vegetables, red wine and black tea, however, cocoa has very powerful levels of it and thus help give the following benefits:

- Heart attack reduction by 39%.
- Stroke reduction by half.
- Blood pressure reduction causes the benefit in stroke.
- Mood elevation.
- Heart failure reduction by one-third.
- CRP (C-reactive protein) reduction which reduces cardiovascular risk.
- Pre-eclampsia in pregnant women reduction.

The dose of chocolate to give these benefits has been found to be on average one small square a day – that is 6-7.7gms per day. There is one proviso however, and that is that researchers have found that if you eat more chocolate than prescribed, your risks may actually become non-existent or increase because of the increased intake of sugar and calories, which may then work against you. Researchers have looked at various types of chocolate and it seems that lower cocoa percentages like 30% may still be of benefit, but the highest the cocoa the better.

Flavonoids in cocoa are thought to work by increasing a gas in the blood called nitric oxide which also helps to dilate arteries. It is thought that flavonoids also help to improve platelet stickiness which may then help to reduce stroke. In one study, at 18 weeks of treatment with dark chocolate, there was a significant average reduction in blood pressure. This study looked at over 19000 people that were mainly women of average age 49. In this particular study, the chocolate consumers ate 57% of milk chocolate and 24% dark chocolate, and 2% white chocolate. They found that the reduction of blood pressure probably contributed to the reduction of heart attack and stroke.

It has been found that people with depressed mood seem to crave and eat more. Researchers are uncertain but they suggest that the polyphenols in chocolate may help neurotransmitter chemical pathways. They also found that people who ate more chocolate had improved mood scores. Interestingly there was no association between mood and caffeine.

CRP (C-reactive protein) is an indicator of inflammation in the body. Studies have shown that moderate chocolate reduction lowers CRP and the outcome of this is 26% reduction in cardiac risk for men and 33% reduction in women.

A study in Sweden showed that heart failure risk over a period of nine years reduced 26% for women who reported a monthly chocolate intake of 1-3 servings, and it reduced by 32% for those who ate 1-2 servings per week. This data suggests that if you are going to have a treat, chocolate is a reasonable choice because of its health benefits. However, several researchers have warned to avoid overindulgence. Interestingly, most of the cocoa content in Swedish chocolate is 30%.

When it comes to pre-eclampsia, a blood pressure health problem in pregnant women, it was found that chocolate reduced the risk. Women consuming five or more servings of chocolate per week in the first three months of pregnancy had a reduction of pre-eclampsia by 19%. If they had this chocolate intake in the last three months of pregnancy, it reduced their risk of pre-eclampsia by 40%.

In another study, all chocolate consumption including chocolate bars, chocolate drinks, chocolate snacks and confectionary biscuits and desserts, including chocolates, were looked at. They found a 37% reduction in heart disease and a 29% reduction in stroke. They also found a reduction in heart disease, diabetes (31% reduction) and metabolic syndrome.

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