

Eating Dark Chocolate May Help Prevent Heart Problems

A Reuters Health article of August 27, 2003 reports on research that shows that eating dark chocolate, but not milk chocolate, raises plasma antioxidant levels, an effect that could help protect against heart disease. The new study from the University of Glasgow, showed eating chocolate increases blood antioxidants but consuming milk at the same time cancels the health benefits.

What are antioxidants? They are compounds that combine with free radicals in the body and neutralize their damaging effects. What are free radicals? These are highly reactive molecules that are produced through normal body processes, as well as external stimuli such as air pollution and tobacco smoke. These free radicals react with billions of cells in the body and may lead to the development of a number of chronic diseases including cancer, cataracts and heart disease. There are many studies in the medical journals demonstrating the positive effects of antioxidants on large populations to decrease the frequency of new cancers as well as decrease the recurrence rates in people who already have cancer. Additionally, antioxidants have been shown to have a positive effect on the cardiovascular system by decreasing the heart attack rate.

Volunteers in the University of Glasgow study were given either plain (dark) chocolate or milk chocolate. Some were also given milk in the double-blind experiment. Then their antioxidant levels were tested. Blood analysis one-hour after dark chocolate was eaten revealed a significant rise in antioxidant levels. "Those volunteers who had dark chocolate had a 20 percent increase in antioxidants in their plasma," said Alan Crozier, one of the research team. "But those who had milk chocolate, or milk with their dark chocolate, showed no increase in epicatechin plasma levels."

Why is Dark Chocolate Healthy?:

Chocolate is made from plants, which means it contains many of the health benefits of dark vegetables. These benefits are from [flavonoids](#), which act as [antioxidants](#). Antioxidants protect the body from aging caused by [free radicals](#), which can cause damage that leads to heart disease. Dark chocolate contains a large number of antioxidants (nearly 8 times the number found in strawberries). Flavonoids also help relax [blood pressure](#) through the production of [nitric oxide](#), and balance certain hormones in the body.

Benefits of dark chocolate... Yes, the legends are true: They do exist!

But, before you go rummaging through year-old Halloween candy and stuffing your face with Snicker's and Tootsie Roll's, there's a few things you need to know.

First, and most importantly, true dark chocolate is usually considered anything at or above 65% cacao.

You're not going to find this percentage mixed in with the Skittles and Gummy Bears, and it does taste a bit different than the sugar-laden milk chocolate you're probably used to, but most convenience and grocery stores do have a few high percentage options to at least take them for a test taste.

Don't worry: Just like with wine, it's an acquired taste for some, and your palette will adjust. I remember the first time I tried 65 percent, and I had to spit it out. I've since worked my way up the cocoa tree to being able to thoroughly enjoy 80-85% (I'm working on the 99, but that's the extreme!).

The higher the percentage of cacao, the more benefits and better nutritional value the chocolate contains.

For example, an average 65% dark chocolate serving would look something like this (these are estimates, as actual numbers will vary, depending on brand, size, etc.): **Total Fat** 15 g, **Sat. Fat** 9 g, **Sugars** 16g, **Protein** 3g.

Comparatively, an average 99% dark chocolate serving would look something like this (these are estimates, as actual numbers will vary, depending on brand, size, etc.): **Total Fat** 22 g, **Sat. Fat** 14 g, **Sugars** 2g, **Protein** 5g.

As you can see, the higher up the percentage scale you go, the less sugar and more protein you're going to get.

You may also notice the high fat content, but the majority of this comes from healthy fats (yes, there is such a thing!).

5 Benefits of Dark Chocolate

1. Studies have shown dark chocolate to lower blood pressure
2. Studies have also shown dark chocolate to lower bad cholesterol (LDL)
3. It turns women on more than a passionate kissing session (no wonder they want it for Valentine's Day!)
4. Contains serotonin, a natural mood-boosting anti-depressant
5. Stimulates pleasure-inducing endorphin production

Now, even though there are several *benefits of dark chocolate*, as with anything else, moderation is key. Make sure your chocolate delights fit into your daily caloric needs, and try to work your way up to the highest percentage dark chocolate you can enjoy.

Want to learn more fun and exciting tips like the [benefits of dark chocolate](#)? Come on over to <http://www.fitbuff.com>

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