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Choose Dark Chocolate for Matters of the Heart



Do you crave chocolate? Your addiction could have unexpected health benefits. Research shows that eating chocolate may lower blood pressure and cholesterol, and improve blood flow.

Cocoa in chocolate is the real health superstar. The cocoa bean is rich in a class of plant nutrients called flavonoids. Flavonoids help protect plants from environmental toxins and help repair damage. When we eat foods rich in flavonoids, it appears that we also benefit from this "antioxidant" power. Just like blueberries and red wine, cocoa beans contain antioxidants that can help fight heart disease.

Cocoa Power

The more natural cocoa in a product, the more antioxidants it contains. But because processing can reduce cocoa's antioxidants, researchers often use special versions of cocoa and chocolate. So we don't yet know the exact health benefits of commercially available chocolate.

In one study, though, women who ate one or two servings of dark chocolate weekly reduced their risk of developing heart failure. In another report that analyzed 10 separate studies, cocoa consumption was found to lower blood pressure among those with high blood pressure.

Darker Is Better

Unfortunately, the sugar, fat and milk often found in chocolate add calories and diminish cocoa's nutritional punch. Look for plain, dark chocolate with the most cocoa bean or cacao you can find — at least 40 to 60 percent. What's best? Cocoa and chocolate made from cocoa marked non-alkalized. Alkalizing, or "dutching" steals nutrients.

Sources: Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic