



For the Love of Chocolate

It just so happens that my fifth anniversary at REALiving falls on National Chocolate Ice Cream Day (June 7). That's a good enough reason for me to talk about chocolate!

Now, it may not come as a surprise (though perhaps a disappointment) to hear that chocolate isn't exactly considered a health food. However, there are some health benefits to cheer about.

- Cocoa, the key ingredient in chocolate, is rich in polyphenols, which are naturally occurring antioxidants.
 - The higher the cocoa content, such as in dark chocolate, the more benefits there are. Look for varieties that contain at least a 65% or higher cocoa content.
 - Studies have found chocolate benefits to include lowering "bad cholesterol" levels, preventing cognitive decline, and reducing the risk of cardiovascular problems.
 - Canadian scientists found that people who ate one serving of chocolate were 22% less likely to experience a stroke than those who did not. Those who ate 2 oz. of chocolate a week were 46% less likely to die from a stroke.
- Migraines. Due to cocoa's tyramine, histamine, and phenylalanine content, some people may experience an increase in migraines with regular chocolate consumption.
 - Bone health. A study published in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that older women who consumed chocolate every day had lower bone density and strength.
 - Heavy metals. Some cocoa powders, chocolate bars, and cacao nibs may contain high levels of cadmium and lead, which are toxic to the kidneys, bones, and other body tissues.

As in the case of most things in life, there are benefits and risks with eating chocolate. Just remember that moderation is key. You certainly shouldn't have to spend your time worrying about the effects of an occasional treat. So, which chocolate holiday will you be celebrating this month?

White chocolate and milk chocolate are not included in the health benefits. They are usually loaded in sugar and fat. If you need a chocolate fix that's not dark chocolate, try a candy bar that doesn't have caramel or nougat. That's just extra calories.

While there are a lot of positives when it comes to chocolate, there are also negatives, some of which are pretty widely known:

- Weight gain. Keep an eye on the label of your favorite chocolate product. It may have a high calorie count due to sugar and fat content.
- Tooth decay. Again, that high sugar content in most chocolate can wreak havoc.



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