

# Chocolate-Love Origins

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Chocolate is made from the cocoa bean (cacao seed) harvested off the trunk of the cacao evergreen tree a true native of America's Amazon. The Latin name is accurately descriptive Theobroma cacao, from the Greek words Theo (God) and broma (drink). Simply mix raw cacao (keh-cow) powder and honey in hot water and you have a drink fit for the Gods. It is not only heavenly for its flavor and its array of abundant nutrients but also for its miraculous ability to mimic the exhilarating feelings of love.

The taste fit for gods might not be included in everyone's palate but the 50 billion dollar annual chocolate market might suggest its popularity with most of us. It's true that the first Caucasians to sample the cacao taste might have thought it too bitter but the addition of honey changed their minds. The Aztec natives added spices like allspice, vanilla and the ubiquitous capsicum (the world's first "hot chocolate"). In the 1800's the Dutch added alkaline salts to eradicate almost all of the bitterness which negated its medicinal qualities. Then Nestle added their new powdered milk which also covered up the bitter but ended up blocking the anti-oxidants. The chemical additions and waxes contribute to manufacturing and distribution but do nothing for the taste. The many vitamins, minerals, and phyto-chemicals inherent in cacao also contribute to its unique flavor. Processing can remove these nutrients and change their subtle flavors. This is another reason to use raw powdered cacao.

As far as abundant nutrients are concerned raw cacao is the highest plant source of Iron at 7.3mg per 100g. Compare this to spinach at 3.6mg and the king of meats, beef, at 2.5mg. Raw cacao has 40 times the antioxidants of blueberries. The ORAC score measures antioxidant ability to absorb free radicals. Raw cacao has a rating of 98,000 compared to blueberries at 2,400. Of the many vitamins and minerals available in 100g of raw cacao of note are zinc 2.3mg or 24% of the daily value, phosphorus 208mg or 30% of the daily value, vitamin B2 at 25% of daily value and surprise Vitamin B-12 at 29% of daily value. The surprise with Vitamin B12 is plants do not produce this nutrient, only micro-organisms. All chocolate production starts with a fermentation stage and that is where the B12 comes from.

Chocolate deserves its reputation as food for lovers. In the 1990's researchers wondered why plant compounds like morphine should have a biological effect on humans. They researched and found that these plant molecules mimic brain molecules and can take up their binding sites. These human morphine like molecules are called enkephalins which are the body's natural pain killers. Further research revealed another molecule that delivers feelings of ecstasy and love that they named Anandamide from the Sanskrit word Ananda which means "extreme delight." Raw cacao has a number of mood enhancing properties such as tryptophan, tyrosine and phenethylamine which triggers the release of endorphins and temporarily prevents the breakdown of Anandamide prolonging the feelings of delight.

Raw cacao powder and chocolate to a lesser degree can make you feel good and as a bonus protect you from heart disease, improve your metabolism, help prevent sun burning, rejuvenate and protect the skin (even from skin cancer), and can help prevent tooth decay. But most of all it can help make us happy.

So, with no guilt have a happy and healthy Valentine's Day.

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