

Wouldn't It Be Lovely? -David Christopher M.H.

Liza Doolittle, in the play *My Fair Lady*, dreamed of a wonderful life of eating chocolate daily. Marketers update this fantasy by promoting freedom from coronary heart disease and controlling weight by consuming this delicacy on a daily basis. They draw from positive, yet observational studies that point to cardiovascular health benefits. In the *British Journal of Medicine* (August 2010) researchers analyzed seven studies, which included over 100,000 people. Conclusions were drawn showing a 37% lower risk of heart disease in those who ate the most chocolate as compared to those, in the study that ate the least amount of chocolate. Also they were 29% less likely to die from stroke. In other studies chocolate has been shown to lower cholesterol, lower blood pressure, decrease insulin resistance, reduce platelet aggregation and improve coronary flow velocity.

Although these observational studies do not address the cause of the results, we can make our own speculation by studying the components of cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*). This herb has polyphenol compounds which contribute to its cardiovascular actions. The flavonoids increase the production of nitric oxide, which calms and dilates blood vessels. The effects of anti-oxidants reduce oxidative stress. Intracellular calcium increases, endothelial estrogen receptors are activated, and endothelial progenitor cells increase resulting in activation of repair mechanisms for damaged vascular tissue.



There are many studies that contradict the referenced studies. Some of these contradictions occur as a result of the processing. Manufacturers know that Americans do not like the taste of bitter so their main objective is to remove bitter compounds. The problem is that most medicinal compounds are bitter, as are flavonoids. So with the success of processing out the bitter, these companies eliminate all health aspects of cocoa.

Additional facts:

- Generally dark chocolate has more flavonoids than milk chocolate.
- Do not be fooled by cocoa content (70% etc.) it depends on the processing.
- Do not worry about the saturated fat content of pure chocolate; the cocoa butter is mainly stearic acid which has a neutral effect on blood cholesterol.
- Milk chocolate depends on added milk fats which are not good for your heart.
- Cocoa powder has the most flavonoids unless it is "Dutch" cocoa which has gone through an alkali process that destroys these beneficial compounds.
- Adding milk to cocoa blocks the absorption of the flavonoids.
- Dark chocolate has about 20 milligrams of caffeine per ounce.
- Chocolate liquor is neither liquid nor alcoholic, it refers to its' cocoa content (half cocoa solids and half cocoa butter).

- White chocolate has no cocoa, consisting of flavorings, sweeteners and the cocoa butter content (which allows it to be called chocolate) usually has been "deodorized" to remove any bitter flavor (medicinal compounds).

When you find the purest, most medicinal yet tasty chocolate, keep in mind that it is not a food but is a treat that is healthy. Rely on fresh fruits and vegetables, which are all high in flavonoids and are the main foods we should be eating.

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