

## 1. Is chocolate good for you?

"I never met a chocolate I didn't like." - Deanna Troi in Star Trek: The Next Generation

Cocoa and chocolate products are made from cacao (*Theobroma cacao*) beans and it has become evident that they are a rich source of antioxidant flavonoids.

Chocolate lovers will be happy to know that there is increasing evidence from clinical and experimental studies showing favourable health effects of chocolate. These benefits may include: an increase in antioxidant activity and reductions in blood pressure, inflammation, LDL cholesterol, and an overall reduction in cardiovascular risk. (Hooray!)

Such studies have shown that cocoa and chocolate contain a high quality and quantity of antioxidant flavonoids, exceeding other well known sources such as black and green tea and red wine. But before you grab your favourite candy bar, note that this is only primarily true of dark chocolate, which contains 2-3 times as many cocoa flavonoids as milk chocolate. However, keep in mind that the flavonoid content of dark chocolate is dependent on the percentage of cocoa used and the manufacturing process, which can destroy flavonoids.

At this point in time, although experts know that dark chocolate has some very positive health effects; there is not enough evidence to form the basis of a public health recommendation for daily intake.



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Chocolate is famous, the international rock star of sweets. Let's face it, when Katherine Hepburn talks about you, you have made it.

There are books, poems, movies, and websites dedicated to it. The Swiss take the gold medal for consuming the most chocolate in the world, at 10-12 kg per capita annually. Australia ranks a lowly 11th in the world for wolfing down chocolate, according to the Association of Chocolate Biscuits and Confectionary Industries (2005).

The world's largest manufacturer of chocolate, Barry Callebaut, has released a product called Acticoa that contains 80% of the flavonoids found in raw cocoa. This cocoa can be used in chocolate drinks, desserts, biscuits, confectionery fillings and snacks. Other companies including Hershey's are jumping on the bandwagon and have released antioxidant milk chocolate and Whole Bean Chocolate® items onto the market.

We need to be mindful that chocolate is relatively high in calories and fat. However, if you are eating a healthy, balanced diet and leading a healthy lifestyle, it is important that you indulge in food that you love, including a little chocolate now and then.

“What you see before you, my friend, is the result of a lifetime of chocolate.”

- Katherine Hepburn