

Chocolate can be good for you!

Cocoa contains flavanols, powerful antioxidants found also in many other foods including red wine, tea, peanuts, onions, apples and cranberries. Research shows that flavanols help prevent heart disease and cancer, and reduce blood pressure. In general, dark chocolate contains more flavanols than milk chocolate although recent studies indicate that not all dark chocolates have equally high levels because of differences in processing.

Chocolate is produced by adding sugar and other ingredients to cocoa, which adds calories. For example, a 100 gram (3.5 ounce) chocolate bar has about 531 calories. Research on the health effects of cocoa and the most healthful ways to prepare chocolate is still needed. Critics of the existing research point to studies conducted on small numbers of people, and to studies funded by the chocolate industry which could be biased. There also is criticism of some research that involved subjects eating large amounts of chocolate (100g). That amount could cause weight gain if eaten frequently. Currently, there is no recommended amount to eat.

On the eve of one of the big chocolate-eating days of the year, keep these suggestions in mind:

- Enjoy small amounts of chocolate: experts suggest 1 ounce or less, a few times a week.

- Get the most cocoa: Choose dark chocolate over milk or white chocolate. Some experts suggest a cocoa concentration of 70% or higher, although less expensive chocolate may not indicate the concentration of cocoa. In general, European chocolate has more cocoa than most American chocolate. When you buy cocoa, look for natural cocoa not processed by the Dutch method.
- Minimize added sugar: Look for products that list cocoa or chocolate liquor — and not sugar — as the first ingredient.
- Minimize unhealthy fats: Sometimes cocoa butter is removed in processing and then some sort of fats are added back in to improve consistency. Cocoa butter is a healthy fat, so it is desirable to have that in the list of ingredients. Avoid partially hydrogenated oils, which have negative health effects.
- For an extra nutrition boost, try chocolate in a trail mix, with nuts, or drizzled over fruits!

References:

Foods that are good – and bad – for your heart by Robert Davis, Lean and Fit, [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), Feb 6, 2012

<http://my.clevelandclinic.org/heart/prevention/nutrition/chocolate.aspx>

Recipe of the Week: Chocolate Pudding

serves 4

adapted from The Best Life Diet Revised and Updated by Bob Greene, available at www.oprah.com

1/4 cup cornstarch
2 to 3 tbsp sugar
3 tbsp unsweetened cocoa
1 ounce dark chocolate, cut into small pieces
2 1/2 cups fat-free milk

1. Place all the ingredients except for the milk in a medium saucepan.
2. Over medium heat, gradually add the milk, stirring constantly. Continue to stir until the

mixture comes to a boil. Boil for one minute, stirring constantly.

3. Remove from heat and transfer to small dessert cups. Chill and serve.

Nutrition Information

calories: 152	fat: 3g	saturated fat: 2g
cholesterol: 3mg		sodium: 67mg
dietary fiber: 2g		protein: 6g

Tip of the Week: A new review of data on millions of marathon and half-marathon runners shows that cardiac arrest during races almost never happens; running a marathon or half-marathon isn't actually very risky. Marathons, as expected, were more risky than less-strenuous half-marathons. Men were at greater risk than women and older runners were more likely to survive a cardiac arrest. - *New England Journal of Medicine*, reported in the *Tufts Health and Nutrition Update*, Feb. 3, 2012.