



Nutrition

The Dark Side of Nutrition: The Health Benefits of Dark Chocolate

[Printer-friendly version](#)

Reviewed by Tama Bloch, RD

Chocolate is so adored that some of us will do almost anything to attain it — from bribing our spouses to go on late-night chocolate runs, to stealing bits of chocolate from our children's holiday stockings. Why do we take such risks for chocolate? Perhaps it's because it may have health benefits.

Chocolate, Why Do I Love Thee?

Research shows that one of the reasons we take such chances for chocolate is the serotonin rush it gives us. Dark chocolate contains polyphenols, antioxidants that also are found in grapes and red wine. Polyphenols heighten levels of serotonin, a critical brain transmitter, the absence of which can cause depression and a multitude of illnesses.

A Friend to Your Heart

For the last two decades, researchers and dietitians also have known that dark chocolate helps lower blood pressure. Registered Dietitian Lisa Andrews, MEd, says, "The polyphenols (antioxidants) found in dark chocolate may improve endothelial function and aid in lowering blood pressure, according to a recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.¹ Chocolate is also a good source of magnesium, a mineral necessary for blood pressure regulation. A small (1 oz) serving per day will do the trick."

But more recent discoveries about the health benefits of dark chocolate are far more surprising. For instance, the antioxidant flavonoids in chocolate work like aspirin, preventing blood platelets from combining and clogging arteries.

An Aphrodisiac for Your Most Important Organ — the Brain

While it's taken modern researchers several years to determine chocolate's effect on the brain, the Aztecs knew all about it. In fact, they valued it so much that their currency was not gold but cocoa beans. Casanova saw its value in another way, as an aphrodisiac, which is why he consumed large quantities of chocolate before his amorous adventures.

The pleasure we get from chocolate may be induced by the feel-good chemicals it releases. Research indicates that certain substances in chocolate may release anandamide,² which increases relaxation and has even been called "the bliss molecule."

Decadent Moderation

Despite dark chocolate's promising health benefits, it's important to remember its dark side. Dietitians warn us about the health risks of too much indulgence. What's the proper dose of chocolate per day? "People should only eat the equivalent of about two dark chocolate kisses per day (this equals about 100 calories)," Andrews says. "The higher the cocoa content, the better. Excessive consumption can lead to obesity and high cholesterol." She adds that chocolate also contains a fair amount of saturated fat, which raises blood cholesterol, increasing, rather than decreasing, your risk of heart disease.

For a treat, try the tasty [Ensure Creamy Milk Chocolate Shake](#) that provides



Take the Challenge

Drink one Ensure® Shake a day for 24 days, and see how you feel!

25 percent of your daily recommended dose of magnesium.

1. Taubert, Dirk, et al. Effects of Low Habitual Cocoa Intake on Blood Pressure and Bioactive Nitric Oxide: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *JAMA* 2007 Jul 4;298:49-60.
2. di Tomaso, Emmanuelle. Brain cannabinoids in chocolate. *Nature* 1996 Aug 22;382:677-678.



[Print this page](#)

[Sign In](#) | [Abbott Global](#) | [Abbott Nutrition Home](#) | [Health Care Professionals](#) | [E-newsletter](#)
[Newsroom](#) | [Unsubscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Site Map](#)



Search Our Site:

[Submit](#)

More from Abbott Nutrition: [Body for LIFE](#) | [Diabetes Control for Life](#) | [EAS](#) | [EleCare](#)
[Glucerna](#) | [Juven](#) | [Mi Beb  Similac](#) | [NutriPals](#) | [Pedialyte](#) | [PediaSure](#)
[PediaSure Enteral](#) | [Abbott Nutrition Store](#) | [Similac](#) | [ZonePerfect](#)

  2009 Abbott Laboratories