published in Reader's Digest,
05 December 2015

link to Reader's Digest article [1]

heart [2] cholesterol [3] homeopathy [4]



A love of chocolate resulted in a sticky end for Augustus Gloop, Veruca Salt and others at Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, yet it transformed Charlie's life for good. What health effects does chocolate really have on us?

Chocolate is the perfect romantic gift [5], energy boost or comfort food. It can even be found in some eyeshadows, soap, perfume and nail polish. Studies suggest it can slow signs of ageing, fight colds and prevent anaemia. Groundbreaking work in Oxford is even investigating whether it can ease the symptoms of multiple sclerosis.

But surely being high in fat and sugar, [6] chocolate is bad for the heart? [7] In fact, recent research challenges this idea.

What do the studies show?

In D?sseldorf, a group of volunteers drank specially prepared fruit flavoured drinks for 14 days. Half of the group's drinks contained flavonoids, naturally occurring compounds found in chocolate, and these were shown to lower blood pressure and improve blood flow. The study was, however, part funded by Mars confectioners, and flavonoids are also found in tea, red wine and berries.

More robust independent research making the chocolate sprinkles a welcome addition to your cappuccino, has since been published by Aberdeen University. More than 20,000 people's chocolate eating habits were monitored over more than 10 years. Higher chocolate intake was associated with a lower risk of heart disease and stroke.

How chocolate helps

For healthy hearts, many people take tablets such as aspirin (to improve blood flow), statins (to lower cholesterol) and beta blockers (to lower blood pressure), whilst eating plenty of fruit and vegetables for their antioxidant properties.

Remarkably, chocolate has been shown, to a lesser extent, to improve blood flow, cholesterol and blood pressure, and cocoa flavonoids are antioxidants. Medication is still necessary, but chocolate is not a bitter pill to swallow in addition.

And the good news gets better

The latest study from Aberdeen University revealed some very appetising surprises:

- While careful monitoring of blood sugars is necessary, a little chocolate may even help insulin to work better and in some cases delay diabetes.
- Chocolate may be high in calories, but the most overweight people in the recent study stated they ate no chocolate. Perhaps there was some underreporting of actual chocolate consumed in this group and less physical activity was also noted in this group.
- Milk chocolate seems to be just as good for the heart as dark chocolate. This was surprising as dark chocolate is higher in flavonoids. Maybe the calcium and fatty acids in the milk are good for us?

Is chocolate the new super food?

Some chocolate manufacturers add cranberries, acai, goji and blueberries and even friendly bacteria to their chocolate to boost its value.

We would do well to follow the advice of Sarah Alderton of the British Nutrition Foundation; “A little bit of chocolate consumed as part of a healthy, balanced diet may perhaps be beneficial for us after all”.

Or, according to the Oompa Loompas at Willy Wonka’s factory:

“Oompa loompa doompety da,

If you’re not greedy, you will go far”.

MEDICAL JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATION

Source URL:https://www.helencowan.co.uk/chocolate-good-heart

Links
[1] http://www.readersdigest.co.uk/health/health-centre/chocolate-good-heart [2] https://www.helencowan.co.uk/../tags/heart [3] https://www.helencowan.co.uk/../tags/cholesterol [4] https://www.helencowan.co.uk/../tags/homeopathy [5] http://www.readersdigest.co.uk/food-drink/food-lists/10-edible-christmas-gifts-your-friends-and-family-will-love [6] http://www.readersdigest.co.uk/health/health-centre/how-learn-and-live-diabetes [7] http://www.readersdigest.co.uk/health/health-centre/strong-hands-strong-heart-does-grip-strength-show-life-expectancy