

CHOCOLATE DOES A “HEART” GOOD?!



In keeping with our “heart” month theme, let’s add a delicious note to another February health tip! Some recent studies show chocolate as a health benefit!

Yes, that is correct, but before you get too excited, there are guidelines to follow when indulging in this delicious treat.

The possible health benefits that chocolate provides are due to antioxidant flavonoids. Chocolate comes from the cacao plant, and cacao is extremely rich in flavanols. Some forms of chocolate have more flavonoids than others. **IMPORTANT: The more nonfat cocoa solids a chocolate product contains, the more antioxidants it tends to contribute.** Cacao does contain some saturated fat (mostly stearic acid) which studies have suggested does not elevate blood cholesterol levels like saturated fatty acids. **IMPORTANT- If the chocolate contains fat ingredients other than cocoa butter, it may contain the more harmful saturated fats and trans-fats.**

Dark chocolate contains higher concentrations of cocoa which is beneficial without the extra calories unlike milk chocolate which contains more calories. What are the possible health benefits of dark chocolate and cocoa for our cardiovascular system?

1. May reduce the risk of a heart attack - blood platelets clotted more slowly in those who ate chocolate than those who did not (When platelets clump, a clot can form resulting in blocked blood vessels and thus can lead to a heart attack.)
2. May decrease blood pressure and increase insulin sensitivity which is important for our cardiovascular health.
3. May improve arterial blood flow which also is important for our cardiovascular health

There are a few new chocolate products now available in markets due to the latest news that chocolate may have health benefits. These include CocoaVia (Mars, Inc.) and Hershey’s Cacao Reserve.

A word of caution to all you chocolate lovers – the health benefits of chocolate may vanish if you are adding more calories in your diet than what is normal for you; thus, adding pounds right along with the flavonoids! The idea is to provide a health benefit, not gain a health hindrance. A little bit goes a long way in satisfying your sweet tooth! Indulge but avoid the “bulge”!

Visit the [Lehigh County intranet site](#) to schedule your appointment at the Wellness Centre.