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Chocolate Lovers Take Heart: Those Flavonoids in Chocolate Could Be Good for You

If you are a chocolate lover, there is good news. According to the latest research information, chocolate may actually be good for you.

Chocolate contains flavonoids, naturally-occurring compounds found in plant-based foods that provide us with antioxidants. Antioxidants help the body's cells resist damage caused by free radicals. Free radicals are the "bad guys". They are the things we want to reduce in our body that cause plaque formation on arterial walls and lead to increases in LDL-cholesterol levels.

Research has also discovered that there are other possible benefits that have been linked to flavonoids. These include the ability to reduce platelet activation, relaxation capabilities of blood vessels and positive promotion of certain hormones that play a role in cardiovascular health.

Unfortunately, not all chocolate carries the same amounts of health benefits. There are certain forms of chocolate that seem to promote more health benefits than others. Chocolate products made with dark chocolate seem to keep the highest levels of flavonoids. On the other hand, Milk Chocolate has little or no levels of flavonoids since it has been processed many times before the final product is made. Currently dark chocolate candy and baking products promote the highest level of possible health benefits.

What about all the fat in chocolate; how can it be good for you? The fat in chocolate is composed of equal amounts of monounsaturated fat (heart healthy fat), and saturated fat (fat we want to avoid). Research shows that the saturated fat in chocolate is made up of two types of acids. One acid, stearic acid, seems to have a neutral effect on cholesterol, while the other acid, palmitic, does raise cholesterol levels. All of this means that only one-third of the fat calories in chocolate may be undesirable.

It doesn't mean that we can consume all the dark chocolate we want. Wise choices are a must. A piece of chocolate that contains other ingredients such as caramel, nuts and cream filling is by no means a heart-healthy choice. We have to keep in mind the additional fat and calories supplied by the ingredients in the total piece of candy.

The second concern is there are no official recommendations suggesting any serving amounts of chocolate to promote cardiovascular benefits. Until more research can be done on this tasty topic, enjoy the occasional small piece of chocolate, preferably dark. While we may be tempted to eat the whole box of candy, remember too much of a good thing could turn into a bad thing. It makes better health sense to enjoy it over an extended period of time.

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Try this Chocolate Angel Food Cake recipe. It is simple, and contains only 205 calories per one twelfth slice. In addition, it has only 6g protein, 5g fat, 1mg cholesterol, 40g carbohydrates, 202mg sodium, and 1g fiber.

Chocolate Angel Food Cake

1 box (14.5 ounce angel food cake mix)

One fourth cup unsweetened cocoa, sifted

One fourth tsp. chocolate flavoring

1 cup skim milk

1 4-serving box sugar-free instant chocolate pudding

8 ounce light whipped topping substitute

In large bowl, combine flour packet of cake with the cocoa. Prepare cake according to package directions. Fold in chocolate flavoring. Bake cake in tube pan according to package directions. When cool, remove the pan. In medium-sized bowl, blend milk and instant pudding with mixer for one to two minutes. Fold in whipped topping substitute. Spread on cooled cake before cutting. Garnish with fresh fruit if desired. 12 servings

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