

Chocolate's Ingredients and the Benefits of Eating Chocolate

Chocolate is derived from the seeds of cacao tree, which is originally native to South and Central America. Chocolate products can be classified into unsweetened, dark, white, bittersweet and milk chocolate depending on the amount of cocoa liquor, solids or butter used. For example, dark chocolate contains up to 70 percent cacao. Chocolate uplifts your mood, lowers the risk of stroke, is rich in fiber and contains vital nutrients. Due to this, chocolate is listed as a functional food since it not only provides some basic nutrients, but also possesses health benefits.

Ingredients

The cacao seeds are roasted and then crushed to form thick chocolate liquor known as unsweetened chocolate. When subjected to pressure, the seeds' fat, known as cocoa butter, is pushed out. The remaining material is then dried and sifted to make cocoa powder. Commercial chocolate is processed from a mixture of chocolate liquor, sugar, milk and cocoa butter. When the percentage of cacao is increased, the chocolate becomes darker in color and its flavor becomes more intense. Interestingly, when the cacao content in the chocolate is increased, there is little room for more sugar.

Reduces Risk of Stroke

According to findings published in October 2011 by Swedish scientists, women who consumed 2 bars of chocolate per week reduced their risk of stroke by 20 percent. This is due to the presence of certain plant nutrients known as flavonoids in cocoa. The amount of catechins - - a class of flavonoids - -in dark chocolate is estimated to be 4 times greater than in tea, according to a review study published in the "American Journal of Clinical Nutrition". Flavonoids possess antioxidant properties which stifle the oxidation of 'bad' cholesterol (low-density lipoprotein). This cholesterol is responsible for cardiovascular diseases such as stroke. It is worthwhile to note that the darker the chocolate, the higher the amount of flavonoids.

Rich in Fiber

Chocolate contains huge amounts of fiber, which leaves you feeling fuller for longer. Darker chocolate contains more fiber due to the high cacao content. Eating chocolate reduces cravings for sweets, salty and fatty foods. Fiber is classified into insoluble and soluble fiber, according to Mayo Clinic. Insoluble fiber promotes digestive health by bulking up the stool to ensure it is eliminated easily from the body. Soluble fiber lowers the levels of blood sugar and cholesterol.

Contains Vital Nutrients

Chocolate contains vital nutrients such as copper, iron, magnesium, potassium and calcium. On average, a single bar of dark chocolate contains about 14 percent, 12 percent, 8 percent and 13.3 percent of the recommended daily values of copper, magnesium, calcium and iron respectively.

Its Heart-Friendly

Chocolate lowers blood pressure and improves the flow of blood in the arteries. If your blood pressure is high, helping yourself to a small bite of dark chocolate lowers the blood pressure.

Improves Brain Moods

A research study conducted by scientists at the University of California at San Diego established that individuals with depressive symptoms tend to consume higher amounts of chocolate. Chocolate contains chemicals such as theobromine, andamide, phenylethylamine and caffeine which affect the brain in various ways. For example, caffeine and theobromine are brain stimulants. Phenylethylamine, when combined with a brain chemical known as dopamine, is a good antidepressant. Eating chocolate also releases serotonin and endorphins. Serotonin calms the brain, while endorphins boost energy intake into the brain and create feelings of euphoria. Chocolate also contains magnesium, which is used to manufacture serotonin.

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