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February 24, 2021

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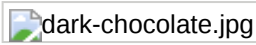
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## Are Dark Chocolate Health Benefits Real?



Naturally we'd all like to be able to trust in those dark chocolate health benefits we've heard so much about. But are they for real?

Is healthy dark chocolate really a dream come true or just another hype marketing fantasy?

Over the past decade we've been indoctrinated with articles singing the praises of dark chocolate health benefits. They tell us dark chocolate has special antioxidants that help prevent heart disease and more.

Of course now-a-days everything claims to have special antioxidants.

But can the proclaimed health benefits of dark chocolate, coffee, alcohol and a multitude of strange fruits really be classified as health foods? â

### Research on Dark Chocolate Health Benefits â

Several years back, researchers spoke at the American Society of Hypertension's Annual Scientific Meeting in New York, stating that dark chocolate and cocoa improves the functioning of blood vessels.

Other studies, published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, showed dark chocolate may have antioxidant heart health benefits.â

- The first study found that dark chocolate or cocoa "when added to a healthy diet" could increase the HDL (good) cholesterol in the body and stop the harmful oxidation of LDL (bad) cholesterol.
- The next, more recent Italian study showed that one hundred grams of dark chocolate a day, over a period of several weeks, lowered blood pressure and improved insulin sensitivity. The beneficial effects were most pronounced in people over the age of 50.
- And then a University of California research project found that dark chocolate or cocoa helped to prevent platelets from becoming sticky, (which increases the risk of dangerous blood clots).

âParticipants fed milk chocolate and white chocolate had no beneficial effects.

Since these studies suggest that dark chocolate is such a heart-healthy food, what could possibly be wrong with adding it to your daily health plan? Well, let's start with a closer look at the research and who funded it.

### âThe Dark Side of the Dark Chocolate Research

The Mars Corporation and the rest of the world's biggest chocolate manufacturers have put millions of dollars into funding university research departments and chocolate studies over the past two decades.

And this includes the presentation and all the research referred to above.

So what's wrong with that? If Phillip Morris had funded studies showing the health benefits of smoking cigarettes, wouldn't you be skeptical? ââBut wait, there are still a few more problems with those chocolate studies.

- They were all very small. Only 23 people were in the first study, a mere 15 participated in the Italian study and just 40 were involved in the University of California project.
- Most commercial chocolate products are high in artery-clogging saturated fats and high glycemic sugars, which have both been shown to raise harmful LDL (bad) cholesterol levels.
- The studies used amounts equivalent to two or three standard dark chocolate bars a day. This would replace other nutritious food and is way more candy than a health-oriented person would normally eat. It's unknown if lower amounts offer any dark chocolate benefits.
- The Italian study group got 500 extra chocolate calories a day. These high amounts of saturated fat and sugar have been shown to lead to overweight, high triglycerides, heart disease, stroke and diabetes, counteracting any potential dark chocolate benefits.

Plus, beside the fact that there are much healthier sources of antioxidants, almost all the dark chocolate that's commercially available has had the bitter-tasting beneficial chocolate flavone-antioxidants removed.

But there's still hope for chocoholics and healthy chocolate solutions.

### Your Best Sources for Antioxidants & Chocolate ââ

Without question, [antioxidants benefits](#) are vital to your well-being and a healthy heart. But you can't beat the health benefits of vegetables, fruit, whole grains and other [high fiber foods](#) as your best sources.

They can significantly lower cholesterol and reduce your risk of many degenerative diseases, including heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

And the [healthiest vegetables](#) and fruits are vitamin high and calorie low. ââ

Plus, here's great news for chocoholics. You can still enjoy the rich flavor of chocolate without all the unhealthy sugar, saturated fat and high calories found in candy, pastries and cocoa butter. How can you do it?ââ

Make hot chocolate with unsweetened cocoa powder and low-fat milk. Or whip up chocolate mousse with 12 ounces of firm tofu, 4 tablespoons of cocoa powder, 1 tablespoon of vanilla and a non-caloric sweetener.

Or, even better and easier, have a daily delicious, low-calorie chocolate protein shake and you can be slim, happy and healthier than ever!

But whatever you do, don't trade the questionable health benefits of dark chocolate for the unquestionable benefits of the [best antioxidant foods](#).

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