**This is what chocolate REALLY does to your body**

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**By**[**Sarah Buchanan**](http://www.dailystar.co.uk/journalists/sarah-buchanan)/**Published 24th May 2017**

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COCOA LOCO: Munching on the sweet treat has a surprising effect on your heart

**IT’S one of the most popular sweet treats across the world, but chocolate can have some surprising effects on your body.**

Chocoholics rejoice because a new study has given us yet another reason to munch on the delicious snack – it’s good for your heart.

Previous research has linked [chocolate, particularly dark chocolate, to good heart health](http://www.dailystar.co.uk/diet-fitness/553039/Is-chocolate-bad-for-your-health-benefits-raw-cacao) as well as other surprising body benefits such as [helping you lose weight](http://www.dailystar.co.uk/diet-fitness/433688/Chocolate-diet-how-to-lose-weight), lowering your cholesterol, [boosting gym stamina](http://www.dailystar.co.uk/diet-fitness/504168/Dark-chocolate-health-benefits-pre-workout-snack-exercise-gym) and [improving sleep](http://www.dailystar.co.uk/health/609035/How-to-sleep-better-in-cant-best-products-help-insomnia).

But now researchers believe people who regularly eat chocolate may also have a lower risk of developing an irregular heartbeat.

Atrial fibrillation is a heart condition that causes an irregular and often abnormally fast heart rate. It affects around 1million people in the UK.

The condition also increases your risk of suffering from other health complications such as heart failure and stroke.

A team of international experts set out to asses the link between chocolate consumption and irregular heartbeats or flutters.

They tracked 55,500 people aged 50 to 64 who were taking part in the Danish Diet, Cancer and Health Study.

The study, published in the journal Heart, found that eating more chocolate was associated with a lower rate of atrial fibrillation among men and women.

The newly-diagnosed atrial fibrillation rate was 10% lower for those who ate between one and three 30g servings of chocolate a month than it was for those who consumed less than one serving a month.

The link was strongest for one serving per week for women and between two and six servings a week for men.

But the authors warned that chocolate is often eaten in high-calorie products containing fat and sugar, which are generally not considered good for heart health.

The researchers, from the Duke Centre for Atrial Fibrillation in North Carolina, US, said that chocolate eaters in the study were healthier and more highly educated - factors associated with better general health - which might have influenced the findings.

They also pointed out that European chocolate has a higher percentage of cocoa compared to countries such as the US.

Victoria Taylor, senior dietician at the British Heart Foundation, said: "Although this is a large study, it is only observational and so other factors could also be responsible for the effects seen.

"The type of chocolate eaten wasn't recorded either, therefore we can't directly translate these findings into recommendations.

"We need additional research to look more carefully at exactly how much cocoa would need to be consumed and how frequently, to see the same benefit.

"If you eat chocolate, keep your portions small and go for dark chocolate with the highest cocoa content."