Chocolate helps prevent irregular heartbeat and THIS is how much you should be having

By [GILES SHELDRICK](http://www.express.co.uk/search?s=%20Giles%20Sheldrick&b=1)

PUBLISHED: 23:40, Tue, May 23, 2017

EATING chocolate regularly significantly reduces the risk of heart flutter, a new study suggests.

Research shows the best way of preventing atrial fibrillation [AF] is for women to enjoy one serving a week, while men can have up to six.

Experts estimate 500,000 people in the UK could be unaware they have an irregular heartbeat, a condition that dramatically increases the risk of stroke.

One in six people will develop AF during their lifetime.

The health link with chocolate came after American researchers examined the medical history and chocolate consumption of 55,502 Danish people [26,400 men and 29,100 women].

One serving was classified as 1 ounce [30g] but participants were not asked to specify which type of chocolate they ate.

Over 13.5 years 3,346 new cases of atrial fibrillation were diagnosed. After accounting for other factors related to heart disease, the newly diagnosed AF rate was 10 per cent lower for those eating between one and three servings of chocolate a month than it was for less than one serving a month.

The difference was also apparent at other levels of consumption: 17 per cent lower for one weekly serving; 20 per cent lower for between two and six weekly servings and 14 per cent lower for one or more daily servings.

When the data was analysed by sex, incidence of atrial fibrillation was lower among women than among men irrespective of intake, but the associations between higher chocolate intake and lower risk of heart flutter remained even after accounting for potentially influential factors.

Research published in the journal Heart suggests one weekly serving of chocolate equated to a 21 per cent lower risk for women, while for men between two and six weekly servings equated to a 23 per cent lower risk.

Study author Dr Elizabeth Mostofsky, of Harvard Chan School in Boston, US, said: “Despite the fact that most of the chocolate consumed in our sample probably contained relatively low concentrations of the potentially protective ingredients, we still observed a robust statistically significant association suggesting that even small amounts of cocoa consumption can have a positive health impact.”

Around 1.2million people with AF have been diagnosed but the British Heart Foundation said there were “hundreds of thousands” more living with a condition that can increase the risk of stroke by up to five times if left untreated.

Estimates suggest around a third of people with AF, which can be caused by high blood pressure, heart disease, thyroid disease and diabetes, are not yet diagnosed. The most common symptoms are palpitations, breathlessness and dizziness.

Victoria Taylor, senior dietician at the BHF, said: “Chocolate, or rather the cocoa it contains, has previously been linked to a variety of cardiovascular benefits and in this case, people who ate more had a lower risk of developing atrial fibrillation.

“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.”

Consultant cardiologist Dr Tim Chico said: “One in four of us will develop atrial fibrillation by the age of 80, which is a major cause of strokes, so it is important to do what we can to reduce our chance of developing this heart rhythm problem.

"The best way to do this is to maintain a healthy weight and blood pressure, perform moderate exercise regularly, and reduce alcohol intake all of which also reduce the chances of other diseases as well.”