**Six bars of chocolate a week could reduce risk of a fatal heart condition, Harvard study says**

  
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**The study found strong links between regularly eating the treat and a reduced risk of suffering a heart flutter. But other researchers, however are skeptical**

Eating up to six bars of chocolate a week could reduce the risk of a potentially fatal heart condition by almost one quarter, a study by Harvard University suggests.

The research on more than 50,000 people found strong links between regularly eating the treat and a reduced risk of suffering a heart flutter.

The strongest association was found among men eating between two and six portions of chocolate a week — with a portion classified as 30g, or a small bar. Those doing so had a 23 per cent lower risk of developing atrial fibrillation, compared with those avoiding such treats. Among women, the effect was linked to eating just one portion a week, which related to a 21 per cent lower risk.

More than 1.5 million people in the U.K. suffer from atrial fibrillation. The condition doubles the risk of dying from other cardiac conditions, including stroke, heart attacks and heart failure. It occurs when electrical impulses in the heart become jumbled, so that blood is pumped less effectively.

Chocolate has previously been linked to other aspects of cardiac health. It is thought it may have an anti-inflammatory effect, because it is high in flavonoids.

Dr. Gavin Sandercock, reader in clinical physiology at the University of Essex, said the group eating the least chocolate – less than one portion a month – were far less healthy than all the others, making comparisons misleading. “They had the highest blood pressure, were most likely to have hypertension, most likely to have high cholesterol and were twice as likely to already have heart disease,” he said.

“They were fatter than all the other groups despite eating the least calories overall. In short, they were the unhealthiest group in the whole study — which means that almost any other group will seem healthier than them.”

The study’s gender difference could be explained by the fact that the average man is able to consume more daily calories without putting on weight.