**WONDER SNACK**

**Eating more of THIS sweet treat can ward off heart disease, stroke and diabetes**

**BY LIZZIE PARRY**

8th December 2016, 1:00 am

Dark chocolate, which is rich in magnesium, can protect the heart, experts have revealed

**EATING more chocolate can help protect your ticker, experts revealed today.**

Much to the joy of those with a sweet tooth, it seems the treat can help ward off heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

But, for those partial to the milk and white varieties, the news may not be so exciting.

For, the benefits are only linked to eating dark choc.

Dark chocolate is rich in magnesium – and it is that key nutrient that experts say can have the protective benefits.

A new study, by scientists at Zhejiang University and Zhengzhou University in China, found people who ate the most dietary magnesium had a 10 per cent lower risk of coronary heart disease, 12 per cent lower risk of stroke and a 26 per cent lower risk of type-2 diabetes.

That’s compared to those eating the least amount of magnesium.

The findings, published in BMC Medicine, suggest that eating an extra 100mg of the nutrient each day can reduce the risk of stroke by seven per cent, and type-2 diabetes by 19 per cent.

Dr Fudi Wang, lead author of the study, which looked at the diets of more than one million people across nine countries, said: “Low levels of magnesium in the body have been associated with a range of diseases but no conclusive evidence has been put forward on the link between dietary magnesium and health risks.

“Our meta-analysis provides the most up-to-date evidence supporting a link between the role of magnesium in food and reducing the risk of disease.”

Dr Wang added: “The current health guidelines recommend a magnesium intake of around 300mg per day for men and 270mg per day for women.

“Despite this, magnesium deficiency is relatively common, affecting between 2.5 per cent and 15 per cent of the general population.

“Our findings will be important for informing the public and policy makers on dietary guidelines to reduce magnesium deficiency related health risks.”

Magnesium is vital for human health and normal biological functions including glucose metabolism, protein production and synthesis of nucleic acids such as DNA.

Diet is the main source of magnesium as the element can be found in foods such as spices, nuts, beans, cocoa, whole grains and green leafy vegetables.

In this analysis, data from 40 epidemiological studies covering a period from 1999 to 2016 were used to investigate associations between dietary magnesium and various diseases.

In all the studies, researchers assessed dietary magnesium were determined using a questionnaire or 24-hour recall via interview.

This meta-analysis involves observational studies meaning that it is not possible to rule out the effect of other biological or lifestyle factors influencing the results.

It is also not possible to determine if magnesium is directly responsible for reducing disease risk.

However, the large size of this analysis provides robust data that were stable when adjusting for gender and study location.

The authors state that their findings reinforce the notion that increased consumption of magnesium rich foods could be beneficial for overall health.