

Daniel I Newman, M.D., N.D., M.S.O.M.

8301 NE Hazel Dell Ave.
P.O.B. 65759
Vancouver, WA 98665

TEL 360-696-3800
FAX 360-696-0906
www.rising-health.com

From Chocolate with Love

Many of us, including myself, love chocolate. Few foods arouse such passion, and have even inspired movies. The scientific name of the plant, *Theobroma cacao*, comes from the Greek term meaning "food of the Gods." Originally native to South America, chocolate was once reserved for Aztec nobility, warriors, and priests. Even as ubiquitous as it is today, chocolate's value is evident: in a recently published survey, given a choice between sex and chocolate, half of the women would keep the chocolate and ditch their lover. (I won't tell you where my wife voted).

Chocophiles will be happy to know that modern scientific research indicates that chocolate is, in fact, a "health food." Chocolate is higher in protective antioxidants than red wine or green tea, including oligomeric procyanidins, polyphenols, catechin, epicatechin, and other bioflavonoids. Cocoa derived products are also high in steric acid, plant sterols, stanols, and both soluble and insoluble fiber, all of which may benefit lipid profiles. Chocolate is high in copper, potassium, and phosphorus, and is higher in magnesium than any other food except seaweed (which may explain premenstrual cravings).

Chocolate has beneficial psychoactive properties as well. It contains L-tryptophan, an amino acid that can elevate brain serotonin levels, thus acting as a natural relaxant. Cocoa also contains phenylethylamine, a natural stimulant that is found in the brain at the highest levels in people who have fallen in love (which may explain survey results above).

Contraindications to chocolate are few: it may trigger migraines in susceptible individuals (due to the presence of an amino acid called tyramine); some people are allergic to it; and it does contain caffeine (much less than coffee) and a related methylxanthine called theobromine, which may rarely cause agitation or insomnia in susceptible individuals. It does not cause acne, in contrast to popular beliefs.

Here is the key to indulging chocolate: to garner its health benefits, you must consume high quality dark chocolate. A small 2001 study showed that high procyanidin content chocolate increased platelet slipperiness (decreasing heart attack and stroke risk) by increasing prostacyclin and decreasing plasma leukotrienes, while low procyanidin chocolate did not. A 2003 study also found that the antioxidant effects of chocolate markedly declined if the chocolate was consumed with milk (either as "milk chocolate" or dairy products consumed with the chocolate).

The best quality dark chocolate is organic, to minimize toxic pesticide residues. It should be sweetened with, optimally, organic raw evaporated sugar cane juice, or, at

least, evaporated raw cane sugar; both of these have a higher nutrient content than conventionally processed sugar, and contain policosanol, a natural lipid lowering agent. To get chocolate's full medicinal value, it should have at least a 70% cocoa content. Three acceptable brands that topped our taste tests are: Dagoba New Moon (74% cocoa content), and Green & Black's Organic Dark (70% cocoa content).

So this Valentine's Day, feed both body and soul while you luxuriate in the gustatory bliss of nature's most decadently delectable heath food – chocolate!