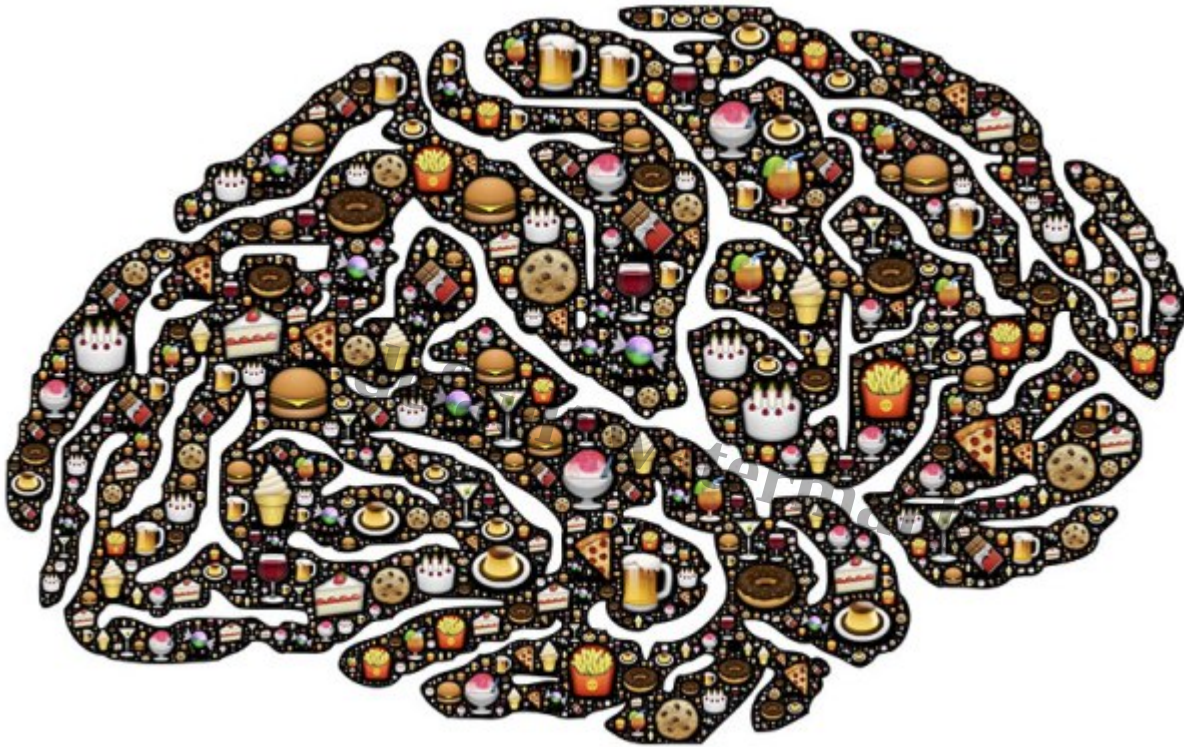


My Favourite Brain Food! Chocolate.

Description



Consuming chocolate in reasonable amounts can be good for the Brain.

For all of you who have given up sweets for Lent, I apologize in advance. Just remember, Easter is coming.

I'm writing today about chocolates, everything from 3 Musketeers to Cadbury to Godiva. We grew up learning the sugary, oh-so-decadent confections represent so many things: Comfort food. Reward for tasks well done. Sympathetic companion in times of bad grades, lost loves and other forms of rejection. An excuse for indulgence. Too much, of course, expands waistlines. Our love of fat, starch and salt, combined with too much sugar, harms our bodies. Diabetes, heart disease and related ailments are the result.

However, now comes word that consuming chocolate "in reasonable amounts" can be good for the Brain. More on what's "reasonable" later.

"We found that people who eat chocolate at least once a week tend to perform better cognitively," psychologist Merrill Elias told The Washington Post. "It's significant it touches a number of cognitive domains within the Brain."

Elias began tracking the cognitive abilities of more than 1,000 people in New York state in the mid-1970s, as part of something called the Maine-Syracuse Longitudinal Study. More recently, he and his team began collecting data about the dietary habits of participants.

Those findings were chronicled in a study published last month in the journal *Appetite*. Georgina Crichton, a nutrition researcher at the University of South Australia, led that portion of the study, assisted by Elias and an epidemiologist.

“Our study definitely indicates that the direction is not that cognitive ability affects chocolate consumption,” Elias added, “but that chocolate consumption affects cognitive ability.”

The researchers knew that nutrients called cocoa flavanols, found naturally in cocoa, seem to have a positive effect on people’s brains, *The Post* reported. And chocolate has methylxanthines, plant-produced compounds that enhance bodily functions, including concentration levels.

I figured this was too good to be true. I decided to seek help at Eastern Virginia Medical School, where Dr. Aaron Vinik is the Murray Waitzer Endowed Chairman for Diabetes Research.

“This excites everybody interested in aging, and everybody interested in Alzheimer’s disease,” he told me Friday. Dark chocolate, he said, is better than “milky” chocolate because of its makeup.

As an aside, he noted the diabetes risk in the United States can’t be ignored. A report from UCLA released Thursday, for example, estimated that nearly half of the adults in California have undiagnosed diabetes or prediabetes.

Chocolate Brain Buttons

All this news about Chocolate, Diabetes and Brains punched a lot of my buttons.

First, I’m addicted to M&M’s. The newsroom splurges on the treat once a week, doling out almond, peanut butter and the plain varieties. At home, they’re an after-dinner treat.

Second, I’m sure my habit contributed to unwanted news during my annual physical. After a blood test, my doctor told me I’m prediabetic, meaning I could develop the disease. (I’m not svelte, but I didn’t think I was overweight. Well, not too overweight.)

I don’t need medication “yet” but Dr. K gave me some stern warnings: Exercise at least 30 minutes daily. Limit the carbs. Take an energy booster. Eat more salads and veggies.

Which brings me back to “reasonable” chocolate consumption. Both Vinik and *The Post* article noted you can’t stuff your mouth with unlimited amounts.

“You have to do it in moderation,” the doctor said.

So have some chocolate, my sweets. Just not too much.

Tell yourselves itâ€™s all about the science.

[Roger Chesley](#)

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Tags

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