

What are the health benefits of chocolate?

## Description



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Next time you eat a piece of chocolate, you may not have to feel overly guilty about it. Despite its bad reputation for causing weight gain, there are a number of health benefits associated with this delicious treat. Chocolate is made from tropical *Theobroma cacao* tree seeds. The earliest use of chocolate dates back to the Olmec civilization in Mesoamerica. After the discovery of the Americas, chocolate became very popular in Europe, and its demand exploded. Chocolate has since become an incredibly popular food product that millions indulge in everyday for its unique, rich, and sweet taste. But what effects does eating chocolate have on our health? This MNT Knowledge Center feature is part of a collection of articles on the [health benefits of popular foods](#). It provides details on the potential [health benefits](#) of chocolate as well as some [risks and precautions](#) that you should be aware of.

### The potential health benefits of chocolate

Throughout the years, chocolate has been on the end of a lot of bad press because of its fat content, and its consumption has been associated with [acne](#), [obesity](#), [high blood pressure](#), [coronary artery disease](#) and [diabetes](#).

However, the recent discovery of biologically active phenolic compounds in cocoa has changed this perception and stimulated research on its effects in ageing, oxidative [stress](#), [blood pressure](#) regulation, and [atherosclerosis](#). Today, chocolate is lauded for its tremendous antioxidant potential.

The potential benefits of eating chocolate are said to include: lowering [cholesterol](#) levels, preventing cognitive decline, and reducing the risk of cardiovascular problems.

### Chocolate may lower cholesterol levels

Chocolate consumption may help reduce LDL cholesterol levels.

A study published in *The Journal of Nutrition* was carried out to determine whether chocolate bars containing plant sterols (PS) and cocoa flavanols (CF) have any effect on cholesterol levels.

The study authors wrote “results indicate that regular consumption of chocolate bars containing PS and CF as part of a low-fat diet may support cardiovascular health by lowering cholesterol and improving blood pressure.”

### Chocolate may prevent memory decline

Scientists at Harvard Medical School suggest that [drinking two cups of hot chocolate a day may help keep the brain healthy](#) and prevent memory decline in older people. The researchers said that hot chocolate can help preserve blood flow in working areas of the brain.

The lead author, Farzaneh A. Sorond, said:

“As different areas of the brain need more energy to complete their tasks, they also need greater blood flow. This relationship, called neurovascular coupling, may play an important role in diseases such as Alzheimer’s.”

### Chocolate may reduce heart disease risk

Research published in the *BMJ (British Medical Journal)* has suggested that consuming chocolate could help lower the risk of developing [heart disease](#) by one third. The report was presented at the European Society of Cardiology Congress in Paris, France.

The authors concluded:

“Based on observational evidence, levels of chocolate consumption seem to be associated with a substantial reduction in the risk of cardiometabolic disorders. Further experimental studies are required to confirm a potentially beneficial effect of chocolate consumption.”

### Chocolate may prevent stroke

Canadian scientists carried out a study involving 44,489 people and found that [people eating chocolate were 22 per cent less likely to suffer a stroke](#) than those who didn’t. In addition, those who had a [stroke](#) but regularly consumed chocolate were 46 percent less likely to die as a result.

### Recent developments on the benefits of chocolate from MNT news

[Teens who eat lots of chocolate tend to be slimmer.](#) Researchers from the University of Granada in Spain found that high chocolate intake among teenagers is linked with lower

levels of total fat, compared to those who do not eat much chocolate, even when accounting for other factors (including exercise).

[Chocolate, wine and berries may protect against type 2 diabetes](#). Consuming high levels of flavonoids, which is found in chocolate, tea, berries and wine, could significantly help protect against type 2 diabetes, according to a study recently published in *The Journal of Nutrition*.

[Chocolate could prevent obesity and diabetes, study suggests](#). Researchers discovered that a certain antioxidant in cocoa – the main ingredient in chocolate – prevented mice from gaining weight and lowered their blood sugar levels. Their study was published in the *Journal of Agricultural Food and Chemistry* in February 2014.

## Risks and precautions

Chocolate has a high calorie count, containing large amounts of sugar. Therefore, if you are trying to slim down or maintain your weight, it may be a good idea to set a limit on your chocolate consumption. The large amount of sugar in most chocolates can also be a cause of tooth decay.

In addition, there is research suggesting that chocolate may cause poor bone structure and [osteoporosis](#).

One study, published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, was carried out to identify the relationship between chocolate consumption and bone density in older women.

The authors concluded that “older women who consume chocolate daily had lower bone density and strength”.

## Video on the benefits of chocolate

In the video below neurophysiologist and wellness coach, Will Clower, Ph.D., talks about the benefits of chocolate and what types are the best.

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