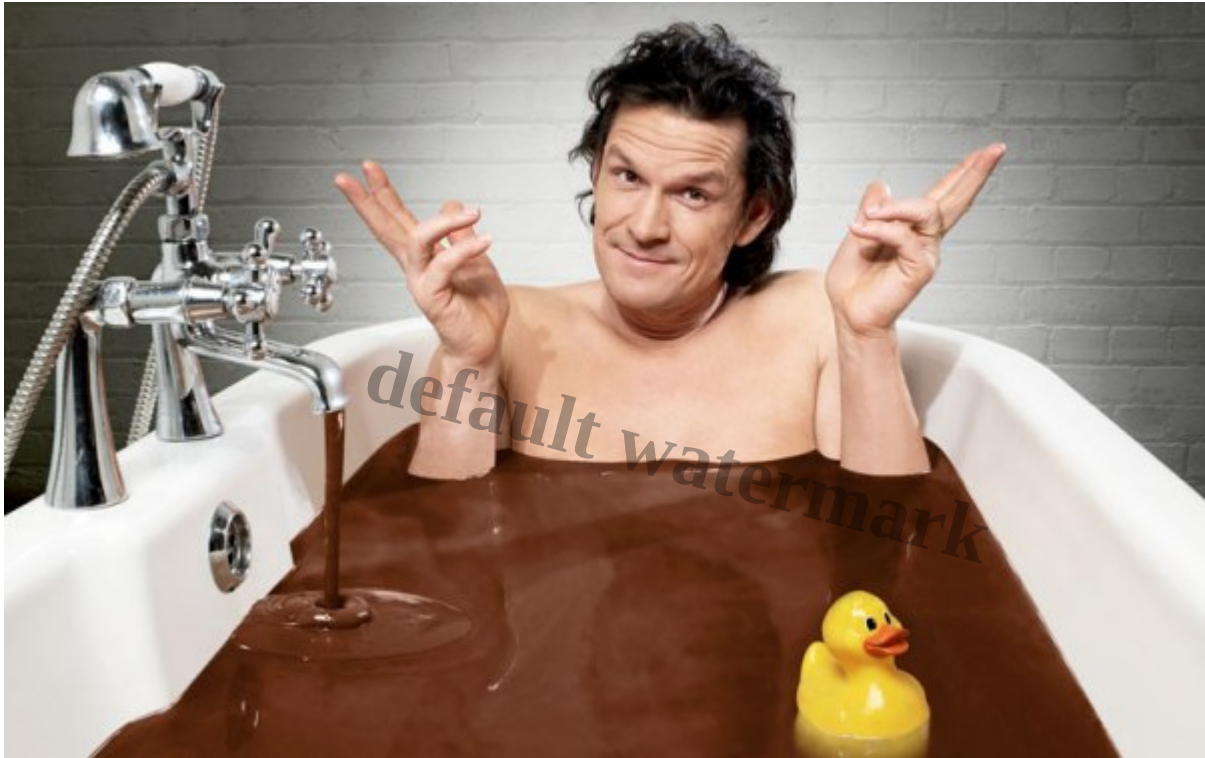


This Guy Eats Chocolate for Every Meal and Is Probably Healthier Than You

Description



This Guy Eats Chocolate for Every Meal and Is Probably Healthier Than You

Chocolate all day, erryday? Sounds like a dream, apart from the pimples, sugar headaches, and inevitable weight gain.

Not for Willie Harcourt-Cooze. The Devon-based chocolate maker incorporates it into almost every meal, but says heâ€™s as lean and energetic as the next juice-chugging clean eater.

Harcourt-Cooze, who gained notoriety as the star of Channel 4â€™s 2008 [Willie Wonkaâ€™s Chocolate Factory](#) documentary, begins the morning with hot chocolate, eats it throughout the day, and uses it for cooking and baking.

The chocolatier reckons he gets through the equivalent of 36 kilograms of 100-percent cacao a year, which is like eating the content of 137 kilograms of Cadburyâ€™s Dairy Milk. The Swiss, who eat the most chocolate on average in the world, only manage [around ten kilograms a year](#). Basically, Harcourt-Cooze eats a hell of a lot.

So how does Willie Harcourt-Cooze do it?

â€œLots of people have been eating the wrong kind,â€• explains Harcourt-Cooze. â€œIf you go back to all the original chocolate makers, they were lovely people who were very keen to make great

chocolate for people to really enjoy.â€•

Harcourt-Cooze fell in love with the cacao while travelling in the Venezuelan Andes. A man renting beach umbrellas told him of a cacao farm in the mountains that was for sale. Harcourt-Cooze visited the one hundred acre plot in the Henri Pittier National Park, fell in love, and learned the basics of cacao farming.

In some parts of the world itâ€™s very normal to cook with it and I donâ€™t think people would look at you weirdly. Only yesterday I grated some 100 percent into my gravy.

Today Harcourt-Cooze sells â€œbean to barâ€• chocolate products through Willieâ€™s Cacao, although turning the Nutella-guzzling masses onto 70-percent cacao hasnâ€™t been without its difficulties (the Channel 4 documentary included some painful grovelling with Selfridges buyers) and [Hugo Chavez reportedly criticised the company](#) for exporting the cacao, rather than carrying out chocolate production in Venezuela. Regardless, Harcourt-Cooze still champions chocolate produced with as high a cacao count as possible.

â€œAs those [original chocolate] companies grew, they changed, and at some point it was decided that sugar is cheaper than cacao, and better for the profit margins, so a lot of sugar went into chocolate,â€• he says. â€œThen manufacturers swapped cocoa butter for vegetable fat.â€•

Your great, great granny probably wouldnâ€™t recognise her favourite chocolate among the sugar-laden varieties we eat now.

â€œWithout realising, from one generation to the next, chocolate has changed,â€• he agrees.

While thereâ€™s no doubting Harcourt-Coozeâ€™s passion for the stuff, he may not be munching as much of it as we think. His morning cup of hot chocolate is made with 45 grams of 100 percent cacao. What he eats throughout the day as he checks on chocolate bar production (one of the perks of being a pseudo Willy Wonka) is 70-percent cacao, and the type he uses for baking and cooking is 100-percent cacao.

Harcourt-Coozeâ€™s secret is eating the right type of chocolate, unsurprisingly one with a lot of cacao, which is often described as a â€œsuperfood.â€• A good chocolate will have a high percentage of non-overly processed cacao beans so you get all the flavour, as well as the goodness.

â€œWhen they talk about the benefits of the antioxidants in chocolate for your cardiovascular system, theyâ€™re talking about good quality dark, not milk,â€• explains Harcourt-Cooze.

Jo Travers, a dietitian at The Harley Street Nutritionist, agrees that dark is the healthier chocolate option.

â€œCocoa provides good quantities of lots of micronutrients including iron, magnesium, and zinc, as well as phytonutrients which are thought to be antioxidant,â€• she explains.

These are the nutrients behind those â€œchocolate is good for youâ€• science-y news reports we cling to in the throes of pain au chocolat cravings.

“There are studies that seem to indicate that cocoa powder can confer health benefits such as lower blood pressure and possible protection against some cancers,” says Travers. “Although it should be stressed that there is nothing conclusive as yet. The problem comes when you mix cacao with loads of fat and sugar, which is likely to negate any health benefits.”

Indeed in an ordinary bar of supermarket chocolate, a lot of the goodness is drowned in sugar and bolstered with flavourings and preservatives.

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“I understand why the companies do it” when people bite into their favourite bar, they want it to be the same every time. So the big producers mix lots of different kinds of beans together and tweak it to be consistent,” says Harcourt-Cooze. “But generally, in the UK, that means milk chocolate is only around 12.5 percent that’s actually beans. Most of the goodness is lost.”

Mainstream versus good Chocolate

It’s not just the nutrition we’re missing out on, there’s the natural high too. Cacao contains theobromine, a slow release endomorphine high. The lift you get from mainstream chocolate is a short-lived sugar-high, but good chocolate gives you a theobromine hit like a shot of caffeine would”without the added anxiety.

“When you’re looking for good chocolate, you’re looking for where the beans come from. Go to the effort of seeking out a single estate bean chocolate. Single origin just means it’s all from the same country”which doesn’t mean much, because of course one farm can differ to the next,” advises Harcourt-Cooze. “And also look at what’s been added in”soy lecithin and vanilla. If you’re using the finest beans, why on earth would you add these? They mask the flavour.”

Basically, the higher the percentage of cacao, the more nutritional value you’ll get. While it would be a bit much to launch into 100-percent cacao bars (the flavour isn’t exactly palatable on its own) it might not be a bad idea to incorporate the ingredient into our cooking.

“In some parts of the world it’s very normal to cook with it and I don’t think people would look at you weirdly. Only yesterday I grated some 100-percent into my gravy,” says Harcourt-Cooze. “It’s a great flavour building block that you can add to enhance your food. I always cook my brown rice with a little lump of it. When I make bread, I add in 90 grams of chocolate for every kilo of flour, it makes the bread a beautiful rich brown colour and when you taste it you get a cacao nutty flavour.”

The dream could be true. Choose the right stuff and eating it for breakfast, lunch, and dinner is possible.

[Johanna Derry](#)

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