

Blog Post

3 Ways Chocolate Makes You smarter



Have you ever heard of a *nourishing* chocolate bar? Not the way we usually think of most people's favorite candy. And yet studies show that chocolate—of the right kind—has several brain nourishing effects.

The surprising fact, for instance, is that a certain kind of chocolate will

- give you 15 times the antioxidants found in blueberries and 20 times those found in green tea
- increase blood flow to the brain for two to three hours, and...
- prevent your brain cells from “rusting.”

The secret?

Cocoa.

Chocolate is made from the cocoa bean. The naturally occurring anti-oxidants in the cocoa bean are transmitted to the chocolate, if processing is kept to a minimum. That's why only a particular kind of chocolate offers the benefits mentioned above.

Milk chocolate, for instance, does not give the benefit of these naturally occurring anti-oxidants because the milk nullifies them.

Dark chocolate, however, with a high cocoa content, mostly escapes the de-nurturing effects of the processing that turns cocoa beans into chocolate bars...or into the cocoa powder that can make a soothing, brain nourishing drink.

Use chocolate to tune up your performance

So what? Well, the flavanols in dark chocolate increase blood flow to the brain. That in turn increases the energy the brain has to do its work. Eating some dark chocolate before a task is a way of “revving up” the brain to the task its being asked to perform.

This can come in handy in any situation where one needs to be at peak performance.

A study done by the Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) showed that a cocoa drink increased blood flow to the brain for two to three hours. Just enough to tune up for that big test.

So if you need to take a test or give a presentation, a cup of cocoa or a square of dark chocolate can give you just the tune-up you need to do your best in a crucial situation.

In addition, that increased blood flow enhances brain function in times of fatigue or sleep deprivation. Need to spend a long night studying? Ditch the Dexedrine and make yourself a cup of cocoa.

A related benefit is that the same flavanols that increase blood flow to the brain also permeate the areas of the brain involved with learning and memory. There they protect the brain against the kind of age related damage that leads to cognitive decline.

Prevent your brain cells from “rusting”

A drawback to all that increased blood flow to the brain is that oxygen comes with it. Now, the brain needs oxygen. In fact, it uses 20% of all the oxygen used by our bodies.

But with oxygen come those unattached oxygen molecules called free radicals.

Free radicals cause our brain cells to “rust” in much the same way oxygen causes metal to rust. Or if you’ve seen a sliced apple turn brown, or noticed wrinkles, brown spots, or sun damage on people’s skin, you’ve seen the impact of free radicals.

Now take any of these pictures and imagine the same thing happening to the cells of your brain.

Not pretty, is it? But the anti-oxidants in dark chocolate can protect our brain cells by neutralizing the impact of free radicals. Knowing this, it’s comforting to remember:

Antioxidants found in dark chocolate?

- 15 times the number found in blueberries
- 20 times the number found in green tea

Boost your intelligence with dark chocolate

Studies prove that the antioxidants in dark chocolate protect and enhance the brain cells. This enables the brain to continually change and adapt itself to new stimuli. And since this “neuroplasticity” is a sign of intelligence, it can rightly be said that the consumption of dark chocolate contributes to the health of brain cells. In this way it not only maintains but it actually enhances intelligence.

The New England Journal of Medicine even suggested that, as unlikely as it may seem, the number of Nobel Prize winners in a given population may correlate with the amount of chocolate consumption in the same population.

So what kind of chocolate?

Dark chocolate, certainly. With cocoa content of at least 70%. Of course, cocoa is not to everyone’s taste, so if 70% is too much for you at first, start with 50% and work up. You do need a bar with at least 70% cocoa to get the full benefits of dark chocolate.

Of course, not everyone appreciates the bitter taste of high cocoa content chocolate. For those people the “dutched” form of dark chocolate might be preferable.

“Dutching” is a process which treats the chocolate with alkali to deepen its color and reduce its bitterness.

The problem with this is that it’s the flavanols that are bitter, so to reduce the bitterness of dark chocolate, the dutching process also reduces the number of flavanols and thus the number of antioxidants in the chocolate.

How many flavanols are lost in a dutched chocolate? The following graph will illustrate.

Lightly dutched chocolate.....60% loss of flavanols

Medium dutched chocolate.....75% loss of flavanols

Heavily dutched chocolate.....90% loss of flavanols

However, even with this reduced number of flavanols in the chocolate, alkali processed dark chocolate is among the top 10% of flavanol containing foods

But for those wanting the full portion of flavanols dark chocolate can give, avoid any bar or powder that says “processed with alkali.”

As with all foods, chocolate from organically grown cocoa beans is best. Also, make sure you check any dark chocolate you buy for sugar content—you want as little as you can get, for both health and weight reasons.

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