

Now We Know: Why Dark Chocolate is Good For Your Heart



It always seemed too good to be true, but it's confirmed now: dark chocolate really is good for you as it helps restore flexibility to arteries while also preventing white blood cells from sticking to the walls of blood vessels. White blood cell adhesion and arterial stiffness are known factors that play a significant role in atherosclerosis.

These findings, published in the March 2014 issue of The FASEB Journal, also show that increasing the flavanol content of dark chocolate did not change this positive effect.

Diederik Esser, PhD, a researcher involved in the work from the Top Institute Food and Nutrition and Wageningen University, Division of Human Nutrition in Wageningen, The Netherlands explained that this work provided a more complete picture of the impact of chocolate consumption in vascular health and showed that increasing flavanol content had no added beneficial effect on vascular health. Esser added that the increased flavanol content clearly affected taste and thereby the motivation to eat these chocolates, concluding that the dark side of chocolate was indeed a healthy one.

In their research, Esser and colleagues evaluated 44 middle-aged overweight men over two periods of four weeks as they consumed 70 grams of chocolate per day. Study participants were given chocolates with a similar cocoa mass content, either specifically produced dark chocolate with high flavanol content or chocolate that was regularly produced.

To assess the outcome, a variety of measurements (important indicators of vascular health) were performed by the researchers before and after the two intervention periods and participants were requested to refrain from certain energy dense food products in order to prevent weight gain during the study.

A further evaluation point was the sensory properties of the high flavanol chocolate and the regular chocolate, and the team of researchers collected the motivation scores of the participants towards eating these chocolates during the intervention.

Gerald Weissmann, MD, and Editor-in-Chief of The FASEB Journal, described the impact that dark chocolate has on our bodies as encouraging. Not only did it allow us to indulge with less guilt, but it could additionally lead the way to therapies that achieve the same effect as dark chocolate, only with better and more consistent results.

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