



Beneficial Bliss

Are you a chocolate lover? I am! My love affair with dark chocolate began in my teens. However, it was many years later when I discovered the health benefits of dark chocolate. What are these benefits?

Bitter dark chocolate that is 70% or higher in cacao is rich in antioxidants (higher than even berries, grapes, apples and kale). According to renowned cardiologist, Dr. Sarah Speck, eating dark chocolate can decrease risk of having a heart attack by 37%, decrease risk of having a stroke by 29% and decrease risk of getting diabetes by 31%. The antioxidants it contains are key to preventing the formation of plaque inside the arteries. The flavonoids and antioxidants are great for cleaning blood vessels and helps arteries to stay flexible.

Dark chocolate is also a vasodilator and increases blood flow to the brain. This can help with memory, mental sharpness and focus. Dark chocolate also reduces blood clotting, improving blood flow to the heart and brain.

According to German researchers (as well as Harvard researchers and at least 24 other medium size studies conducted), dark chocolate lowers blood pressure and it is recommended to eat a small square of dark chocolate every day. The research done in Germany found that after eating one square per day for 18 weeks lowered blood pressure without adding any weight to the participants. This result was the same for all studies. If, however, you find your blood pressure rises from dark chocolate, it is recommended to see a Doctor, as this is not normal.

Another benefit to dark chocolate is that it promotes pleasure. It stimulates our feel-good neurotransmitters (endorphins) and creates a chemical reaction that

makes us feel content and calm. Dark chocolate increases serotonin—it contains serotonin and L-tryptophan, which can aid those with depression, improving mood and lowering anxiety.

Will chocolate rot your teeth? Actually, it is the opposite. Compounds in dark chocolate have been found to prevent tooth decay. There is a concentration of chemicals in dark chocolate that combat bacteria, harden the enamel of teeth, reduce chances of periodontal disease and reduce tooth decay. Some chemicals found in dark chocolate might even be used in mouth washes in the future.

Dark chocolate also contains iron, magnesium and copper. It also contains oxalates, so if you are predisposed to kidney stones, chocolate should not be eaten too often. For the average person not disposed to kidney stones, 1 to 3 pieces daily can be quite beneficial.

Not all chocolates are created equal. When looking for a high quality beneficial chocolate, we might want to shop in a gourmet chocolate shop or stores known to carry high quality and specialty chocolates (these should contain 70% or more of cacao). Most of what we'd find in regular grocery store chains do not provide the highest quality or benefits. But, I have found a few good ones in the regular grocery stores (only a few).

When you're shopping for your dark chocolate, remember, the higher the cacao content, the more heart healthy flavonoids the chocolate will contain. ♦