

Reader's digest

This Is What Happens to Your Body When You Eat Chocolate

By Emily DiNuzzo

Chocolate has more than 600 flavor compounds, according to *Outside*. In addition to rocking your taste buds, this popular treat affects different parts of your body—from your brain to your skin.

The benefits of dark chocolate begin right after you take that first bite, according to Lee Berk, DrPH, an associate dean of research affairs at Loma Linda University who researches the benefits of chocolate. “The studies on human subjects which we’ve done measure the brain waves after eating just half a standard-sized bar, or 48 grams, of 70 percent dark chocolate,” Dr. Berk says. “The effects continue through a two-hour period after consumption, and we have ongoing research studying the amount of dark chocolate needed to consume relative to the number and amount of benefits.”

Those benefits right after that first bite are thanks to the brain chemicals serotonin and dopamine, which increase when you eat chocolate and alter your mood as the cocoa is absorbed into the bloodstream—resulting in pleasure. Carol Aguirre, RD, explains that chocolate has phenylethylamine, a compound called the “love drug” because it creates a brain buzz similar to being in love, Aguirre says.

Although some people don’t discriminate against different varieties of chocolate when it comes to taste, certain kinds have better effects on the body than others, notes neurosurgeon Darlene Mayo, MD, author of *Stop Spilling Your Soup! The Complete Essential Tremor Solution*. It is dark chocolate that is at least 85 percent cacao that specifically increases those feel-good brain chemicals, decreasing anxiety and feelings of depression, according to Dr. Mayo. White chocolate also increases the level of dopamine in the brain, although Dr. Mayo says it’s not nearly as effective as its dark counterpart. Check out these 11 next-level chocolates with unbelievable health benefits.

Chocolate has long-term benefits, too. Flavanols, which play a role in chocolate’s mood-boosting effects, also play a role in the long-term benefits, according to Anandhi Narasimhan, MD, a psychiatrist. The numerous health benefits of eating moderate amounts include reduced inflammation, reduced blood sugar, and decreased levels of bad LDL cholesterol, Dr. Narasimhan says.

Dr. Berk adds that chocolate enhances the communication between our brain cells, resulting in benefits to behavior and memory recall. Plus, eating chocolate improves blood flow to the brain, heart, and lungs, resulting in lower blood pressure, which lasts over a two-hour period—and continues when you consume cacao periodically throughout the day, he notes. It even inhibits digestive enzymes, which may help with weight loss and reduce food cravings, as shown in other chocolate research studies, according to Dr. Berk.

The benefits from dark chocolate don't necessarily apply to other candy. Sugary snacks also provide a quick spike in energy and feel-good emotions, but dark chocolate differs in that it contains minimal additional sugars. This means it has a better overall nutritional value thanks to the antioxidants found in the cacao, Dr. Berk says. This potent source of antioxidants is extremely beneficial to the skin, according to **Ava Shamban, MD**, a Beverly Hills, California-based dermatologist and founder of Skin Five. More sugary chocolate, however, could contribute to breakouts, she says.

Aguirre notes, too, that the daily dose of antioxidants in dark chocolate doesn't mean you should have a dessert free-for-all. Chocolate still contains calories, sugar, and fat, and too much of even a good thing could be a bad thing. Dr. Berk advises passing up "cheap" chocolate bars that often have extra sugar and splurging instead on chocolate with more than 70 percent cacao. Next, read more about the health benefits of chocolate.

<https://www.rd.com/health/wellness/what-chocolate-does-to-your-body/>