



Making Life Easier®

Indulge in Dark Chocolate's Health Benefits

For those of us who have celebrated our 29th birthday multiple times, recent reports of health benefits from eating chocolate may make aging more palatable – *pun intended*. While chocolate is unlikely to become the sixth food group on MyPlate (www.ChooseMyPlate.gov), numerous studies have identified health benefits linked to eating this decadent treat, a favorite to many. Though it may sound odd, the consumption of chocolate has been associated with several health benefits, including:

- Lower blood pressure
- Improved cardiovascular health
- Better brain performance
- Reduced risk of stroke
- Better renal (kidney) function
- Lower Body Mass Index (BMI)

Researchers attribute these health benefits to a high concentration of flavonoids in certain types of chocolate. Flavonoids are rich in antioxidants, such as those found in apples, green tea and even red wine. Before indulging, it is important to know that not all types of chocolate are potentially beneficial. Dark chocolate is considered the best due to higher cocoa content. Likewise, there are few if any health benefits associated with eating white chocolate.

In its purest form, chocolate is bitter and foul-tasting; therefore, sugar and fat are added to make it sweet and smooth. Because most types of chocolates are highly processed and include nuts, caramel and other fillers, they tend to be high in saturated fats and loaded with sugar. Additionally, the milk in milk chocolate is reported to interfere with the absorption of antioxidants. What makes dark chocolate the best is the higher concentration of natural antioxidants due to the least amount of processing.

According to the [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#) (formerly the American Dietetic Association), the quality and quantity of a person's diet plays a major role in preventing, delaying, and managing chronic illnesses associated with aging; therefore, it's important to indulge in moderation. For those who crave chocolate, experts suggest eating no more than 2 oz. (a standard size chocolate bar) of dark chocolate a day to maximize health benefits.

With any food or candy, it is important to read the [Nutritional Facts](#) on the packaging. Many of our favorite foods, especially processed ones, are often high in calories, fat, sodium and carbohydrates, and sugar is frequently one of the top five ingredients.

Health Benefits of Chocolate

Researchers believe the high concentration of flavonoids in certain types of chocolate is what leads to these health benefits:

- Lower blood pressure
- Improved cardiovascular health
- Better brain performance
- Reduced risk of stroke
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At Home Helpers, we understand that growing older increases nutritional risk. “Due to aging, illness and injury, many people are unable to manage their own nutrition,” said Mary Doepke, RN, Owner of Home Helpers of Hinsdale. “Findings from research indicate over 80% of older people are not eating a good quality diet. Having someone to help with meal planning, grocery shopping, cooking and cleaning up the kitchen can help ensure adequate nutrition.”

At Home Helpers, in addition to Making *Life Easier*[®], we strive to add to our clients’ quality of life. We provide companionship to people who might otherwise be alone, help with meals, transportation and more. We can even take clients shopping for chocolate or wishing to splurge on a hot fudge sundae at the local ice cream parlor, helping them to enjoy each and every day just a little more.

NOTE: For people with pets, be sure to keep chocolate out of reach. Last year, there were more than 100,000 reported cases of pet poisoning; in many of which chocolate was a factor.

Helpful Resources:

- Hershey’s Nutrition & Wellness – www.thehersheycompany.com/nutrition-and-wellness.aspx
- Mayo Clinic – Nutrition Facts: An interactive guide to food labels – www.mayoclinic.com/health/nutrition-facts/NU00293

HOME HELPERS – *Making Life Easier* Home Helpers offers a complete continuum of home care services, from non-medical care and companionship to personal care and medical services,* similar to the care and support often provided by family members. Our flexible care plans are tailored to fit our clients’ specific needs and budgets. Compassionate Care is a bi-monthly newsletter produced by Home Helpers. We hope you found this edition to be informative and helpful.

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*Personal care and medical services provided as permitted by state law. Each office is independently owned and operated. Home Helpers does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of religion, race, sex, color, national origin, ethnicity, disability, age or sexual preference in connection with employment or acceptance, treatment, or participation in its programs, services and activities.