



BY ABIGAIL GILMORE

# Chocolate

Chocolate is a guilty pleasure for many, but depending on what type you prefer, you may not have to feel guilty at all. Believe it or not, certain kinds of chocolate actually offer some health benefits! But be wary, as holistic nutritionist and owner of Awakened Reconnection, Maya E. Nahra, RD, LD said, **“All chocolate is not created equal.”**

There is a lot of processing involved in the production of chocolate before you get your hands on it, Nahra said, as pure chocolate is very pungent in taste. “The processing includes fermentation, alkalization, roasting and more, all of which deplete the flavonol content where the main health benefits [and antioxidants] of chocolate are found,” she said. “For example, cocoa powder that has not undergone Dutch processing [cocoa that is treated with an alkali to neutralize its natural acidity] is less processed and therefore retains more of its flavonol content.”

For you chocolate lovers, dark chocolate has been indicated to be healthier for you than milk chocolate, as sugars and fats are added to milk chocolate during the process. However, even dark chocolate can be over-processed. “As manufacturers are seeking out ways to keep processing to a minimum, it is always best to be aware of the source and processing [of] your chocolate bar,” Nahra said.

## Health benefits

Eating dark chocolate can help you stay healthy, but it is important to remember what element of the chocolate is truly helping you: the cocoa.

Naturopathic Doctor Wendy Wells added, “The best chocolate to eat would be the pure raw plant ‘cacao.’ This is unprocessed and has the highest quantity of flavonoids. However, the taste is quite bitter.”

“Cocoa seeds found within pods of the cacao tree contain very high amounts of antioxidants called flavonols, which help protect plants by shielding them from environmental toxins and helping repair damage. In our body, they are especially helpful in protecting the blood vessel linings and may also help prevent high blood pressure,” Nahra said.

Additionally, chocolate can help keep us in overall good health. “Eating chocolate releases endorphins and serotonin from the brain; both of these contribute to a sense of ‘well-being,’” Wells said. “Chocolate contains theobromine and caffeine, both of which are stimulants and can help us focus. Chocolate also contains anandamide, which opens up our nerve cell channels in the brain in our ‘feel good’ centers.”

## What about the fat?

Though chocolate does have health benefiting qualities, it does indeed contain fats, but not all of those fats are bad for you, said Doctor Katka Novakova of Rejuvena Health & Aesthetics. “In our society, fat has been given a very bad name and so automatically everything with fat is bad for us,” Novakova said. “That is not the case. Fats are actually an essential part of our diet.”

Wells recommends limiting chocolate intake to about 3.5 ounces a day to reap the health benefits while managing your waistline. Nahra added, *“Eating a piece or two a day never hurt anyone!”*

# THE HEALTHY GUILTY PLEASURE

SOURCES  
 awakenedreconnection.com  
 Doctor Katka Novakova of Rejuvena Health & Aesthetics  
 Doctor Wendy Wells of Wellsource Naturopathic Center  
 Maya E. Nahra, RD, LD of Awakened Reconnection