

Good News for Chocoholics: Chocolate Good for Arteries

Jack McGoughey, Yahoo! Contributor Network Mar 26, 2007

According to new research, dark chocolate improves the function of blood vessels. The small clinical study gives chocoholics everywhere reason to celebrate.

The study was conducted by researchers at the Yale Prevention Research Center in Connecticut.

While the researchers in the study cautioned against bingeing on chocolate, they did say that the findings of the trial were clear and called for larger studies to help confirm the results.

"In this sample of healthy adults, dark chocolate ingestion over a short period of time was shown to significantly improve (blood vessel) function," said Dr. Valentine Yanchou Njike of Yale Prevention Research Center, a co-investigator of the study.

The results were presented at the annual American College of Cardiology scientific meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana. The results add to evidence that is building that indicates the health benefits of dark chocolate.

During the study's six week trial, 45 healthy people with a body mass index (BMI) between 25 and 35 kg/m², were given eight ounces (227 grams) of cocoa without sugar, cocoa with sugar, or a placebo each day. For six weeks the subjects underwent endothelial function testing by using high frequency ultrasound to measure the ability of an artery to relax and expand.

BMI is a measure of body fat based on height and weight of a person. A body mass index reading of 25-29.9 is an indicator of being overweight. A reading of 30 or more indicates obesity in a person.

An upper arm artery's ability to relax and expand to accommodate increase blood flow was measured using high frequency ultrasound before and after the cocoa or placebo were consumed each day. Increased blood flow is known as flow mediated dilation, or FMD.

Out of the 39 test subjects who completed the six week trial, FMD improved significantly in both groups who consumed cocoa. It improved by 2.4 percent among those who had it without sugar, and 1.5 percent among those who had cocoa with sugar. It dropped 0.8 percent for those who consumed placebo.

"While the findings from this study do not suggest that people should start eating more chocolate as part of their daily routine, it does suggest that we pay more attention to how dark chocolate and other flavonoid-rich foods might offer cardiovascular benefits," Njike said.

Cocoa is rich in a group of antioxidant compounds called flavonoids. They are also found in fruits, vegetables, wine, and green tea. Research suggests that consuming foods rich in flavonoids may decrease the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Sources:

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