

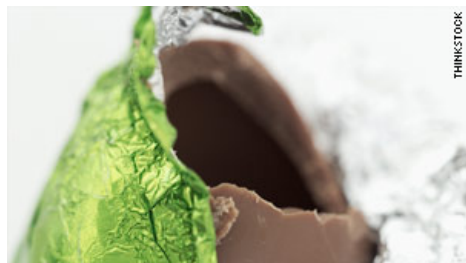


SEARCH

Part of complete coverage on **Matters of the Heart**

Daily chocolate may keep the heart doctor away

By **Denise Mann**, Health.com
March 30, 2010 3:07 p.m. EDT



(Health.com) -- Eating as little as a quarter of an ounce of chocolate each day -- an amount equal to about one small Easter egg -- may lower your risk of experiencing a heart attack or stroke, a new study has found. For best results, the chocolate should be dark, experts say.

People who ate the most chocolate had a 27 percent and 48 percent reduced risk of heart attack and stroke.

"Dark chocolate exhibits the greatest effects, milk chocolate fewer, and white chocolate no effects," says the lead author of the study, Brian Buijsse, a nutritional epidemiologist at

the German Institute of Human Nutrition, in Nuthetal, Germany.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Eating as little as a quarter of an ounce of chocolate each day could help prevent heart attack, stroke

For best results, the chocolate should be dark, experts say

Flavonoids appear to promote artery health and reduce inflammation

In the study, Buijsse and his colleagues followed nearly 20,000 people for an average of eight years. The researchers surveyed the study participants about their chocolate consumption (as well as the rest of their diet), and also tracked the heart attacks and strokes that occurred in the group.

Compared with people who rarely ate chocolate (about one bar per month), the people who ate the most chocolate (slightly more than one bar per week) had a 27 percent and 48 percent reduced risk of heart attack and stroke, respectively, the researchers found.

[Health.com: How to make chocolate a healthy indulgence](#)

The heart benefits observed in the study may be due in part to lower blood pressure, the study notes. Previous studies have suggested that eating chocolate can lower blood pressure, and the researchers observed a similar -- though less pronounced -- association in this study.

"The good news is that chocolate is not as bad as we used to think, and may even lower the risk of heart disease and stroke," says Buijsse. "The bad news, at least for some of us, is that the amounts that are needed to benefit from these effects appear to be quite low."

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In other words, these findings don't mean that you should stuff yourself with chocolate Easter eggs. Chocolate is high in calories, and, as with any such food, eating too much of it can swell your waistline and harm your health in other ways.

[Health.com: 8 rich desserts for 300 calories or less](#)

"This is only one small egg per day," says Buijsse. "Eating higher amounts will most likely result in weight gain. If people start eating small amounts of chocolate, it should replace something else, preferably other high-calorie sweets or snacks."

The people in the study were part of a larger study on the effect of diet and lifestyle on cancer risk. For the current study, Buijsse and his colleagues excluded anyone with a history of heart disease or stroke, and also controlled for age, diet, lifestyle, and other factors. Still, they note that factors not recorded in the surveys -- rather than chocolate consumption alone -- could have been responsible for some or all of the health benefits they observed.

The study had some other important limitations. Most notably, the researchers did not determine whether the study participants ate dark, milk, or white chocolate.

[Health.com: 10 best foods for your heart](#)

Using one of the surveys administered during the study, the researchers estimated that 57 percent of the participants ate milk chocolate, 24 percent ate dark chocolate, and 2 percent ate white chocolate.

This data, however, came from a subset of just under 1,600 participants, so they are merely estimates that may not have been borne out in the full study population.

Experts believe that natural compounds known as flavonoids (or flavonols), which appear to promote artery health and reduce inflammation, are responsible for the cardiovascular benefits that have been associated with chocolate consumption.

[Health.com: Food swaps that cut cholesterol, not taste](#)

Flavonols are found in cocoa, and dark chocolate contains more cocoa than milk chocolate does.

"The benefits of chocolate come from flavonoids, and those are mainly found in dark chocolate, not Easter eggs, which are usually milk chocolate and have a lot of saturated fat," says Julia Zumpano, a registered clinical dietitian at the Cleveland Clinic, in Ohio.

"I usually recommend less than one ounce of dark chocolate a day - a tiny square -- for heart health," she adds. "The chocolate should be at least 70 percent cocoa with limited added sugar."

[Health.com: 20 meals that won't kill your cholesterol](#)

This study is merely the latest to point to the heart benefits of chocolate. In addition to lower blood pressure, cocoa consumption has been linked to improved blood vessel function, lower LDL (or bad cholesterol), and higher HDL (good cholesterol) in recent years.

Despite their findings, Buijsse and his colleagues caution that more

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research, namely randomized trials on the heart benefits of chocolate, is needed. Buijsse admits to being conservative about his own chocolate consumption.

"If I eat chocolate, which is not on a daily basis, I limit my intake to a small piece," he says.

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PineyWarbler

PineyWarbler

well I think the lesson is to buy a big chunk of south american dark chocolate and keep it in fridge. Once a week, use a cheese grater to bake a bowl of bite sized pieces for one-a-day bites, eaten with a teaspoon of fish oil. :O)

1 minute ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



beamerUSA

beamerUSA

You Lie.Chocolate, liqour and coffee is not good for you. These articles are planted by the industries lobbyists. All bad stuff is being promoted regularly to increase profits. Same way most of the tests ordered by doctors nowadays are to generate money. And the new c rop of medicines coming up ever [...more](#)

5 minutes ago | [Like \(1\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



Niqui

Niqui

These things you list, when taken in moderation, actually prove to be fairly beneficial. The key word is moderation... of course binging on liquor, coffee and chocolate has negative consequences.

0 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



android1

android1

First its bad for you, than it's good for you, than its bad for you again,than you should eat it everyday.Hmmmmmmmmmmmm.

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frak

frak

If eating chocolate is good for your health, I'm gonna be freakin' immortal!

7 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



seraphimo

seraphimo

It amazes me that people classify this as research. When I think of my parents and grandparents generations, many of them ate pretty much anything (mostly home made, unprocessed), drank alcohol, some smoked and yet they all lived healthy and long lives. At the same time they were way more active tha ...more

32 minutes ago | [Like \(4\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



GuyWalkingBy

GuyWalkingBy

Now *this* is research I can sink my teeth into! :-)

36 minutes ago | [Like \(2\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



Abhishek420

Abhishek420

Man, I remember in Kuwait we used to get these Kinder Chocolate Eggs. With a toy inside! The chocolate was MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMmmmmmm!! And the toy, an added bonus when you're a 10 year old kid with some pocket money. Good times good times!

37 minutes ago | [Like \(3\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



Puleaze

Puleaze

Sounds like a choking hazard.

10 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



mastarula

mastarula

They didn't mention that dark chocolate can be harmful aswell due to the high cadmium which can be absorbed by the cocoa plant (especially cocoa plants in south america). Just google for it, you'll find some very interesting articles.

42 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)



musomesa

musomesa

...and pray what are you supposed to do with the rest of the bar?

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FTWRER

FTWRER

OH HOW I LOVE CHOCOLATE, THE DARKER THE BETTER, NOW I HAVE HEARD THAT CHOCOLATE IS BAD FOR DOGS, IS THAT TRUE,?? ALL THREE OF MY HOUNDS LOVE CHOCOLATE,AND ARE QUITE HEALTHY.SEE YOU AT THE SEE,S STORE.

44 minutes ago | [Like \(1\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



guthrie101

guthrie101

FIRST AND FINEST LUXURY CAMEL MILK CHOCOLATE.....HAVE DARK TOO 70%
CamelDelite dot com
Just came to market from Dubai 3 months ago, in partnership with Vienna.

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dollar122

dollar122

oh good, i like this article. i just shoved my face full of chocolate that past few nights before i went to bed. i should be covered on the heart attacks and strokes for at least the next few months. i might attack another large chocolate bar tonight as well. i guess i will go with the dark choc ...more

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Walker1971

Walker1971

I'm waiting for the "April Fools!"

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Jeepers01

Jeepers01

Eff yeah. I can commit to that kind of "healthy eating."

1 hour ago | [Like \(4\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



madMax2010

madMax2010

The study says that white chocolate is no good. Yesterday, I had bought a box of Lindt mixed chocolates (dark, milk and white). Now what do I do with the white ones?? I hoped they could have published their results one day earlier! After all they started their study 8 years back!

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GuyWalkingBy

GuyWalkingBy

Give 'em to me - I'll take care of them for you! :-)

37 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)

**Guest**

Guest

What makes chocolate tasty is of course the sugar that's always mixed with it. The article says nothing about the offsetting effect of sugar, especially for people with diabetes. Without that information, the article is useless.

1 hour ago | [Like \(1\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)

**Afrodite**

Afrodite

And the caffeine in dark chocolate is also nontrivial, especially if you eat more than quarter of an ounce a day (but who does that; normally one eats a nice chunk before guilt sets in.)

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**Guest**

Guest

This story always surfaces its head this time of year. The fact is that Milk Chocolate is bad for you (way too much saturated fat). Only the Cacao bars at 72% and 85% are good for you, the really dark chocolate. The best way is to drink Cacao not as a chocolate but as a tea.

1 hour ago | [Like \(1\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)

**dachips**

dachips

so if "...may lower your risk of experiencing a heart attack or stroke.." can we measure by how much? Because when you eat chocolate you usually "add up" extra calories and get a little fatter (especially if its not just one Easter egg). So being fat actually add a risk of stroke ... by how much? The [...more](#)

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**Frankie6300**

Frankie6300

One "tiny square"? Ha! Ha ha ha! I laugh at your "tiny square!" Mwahahahahhah!

1 hour ago | [Like \(10\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)

**anthony1832**

anthony1832

*This message brought to you by Hershey's

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**bostoncreme**

bostoncreme

This was hilarious very good sense of humor.

18 minutes ago | [Like](#) | [Report abuse](#)

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