



Cook Wise. Eat Wise. Live Wise.

A monthly nutrition and wellness newsletter brought to you by University Housing and Dining.

What's the Tea?



Is Chocolate Good For Your Heart?

Annually on February 14, many Americans celebrate love with symbols of hearts; cards with bright red hearts, candy conversation hearts and the iconic heart-shaped box of chocolates. While a heart-shaped box of chocolates may seem like the opposite of healthy, chocolate has gotten a lot of media attention in recent years with claims that it may help protect the cardiovascular system – the heart.

The reason chocolate has been touted as heart-healthy is because the cacao bean, from which chocolate is made, is rich in a class of plant nutrients called flavonoids. Flavanols are the main type of flavonoid found in cacao and therefore chocolate. In addition to having antioxidant properties, research shows that flavanols have other potential influences on cardiovascular health, such as lowering blood pressure, improving blood flow to the brain and heart and making blood platelets less sticky and able to clot.

But not all chocolate is created equal. Let's look at how chocolate is made to understand why. Cacao beans are fermented, dried and roasted. Then the cacao nibs are extracted, ground and liquefied to make what is known as cocoa liquor. That liquor is a mix of cacao solids and cocoa butter: pure chocolate. But pure chocolate is very bitter and brittle, so sugar, milk, vanilla, emulsifiers and various flavorings are often added to create the smooth and sweet chocolate we all know and love.

The number you see on chocolate labels indicates what percentage of that chocolate is made from the pure cocoa liquor versus all of the other added ingredients. Generally, the higher the percentage, the higher the flavonoid content, as it contains more pure chocolate.

Milk chocolate typically contains about 10 percent cocoa liquor, while dark chocolate contains a minimum of 35 percent cocoa liquor. White chocolate, on the other hand, only contains cocoa butter – no cacao solids. It is primarily made up of sugar and other ingredients, which is why many people do not even consider it actual chocolate.

Unfortunately though, while dark chocolate has more flavanols than other types of chocolate, research indicates that the amount of dietary flavanols needed to positively impact health are unlikely achievable with daily consumption of dark chocolate. So while some studies show a positive correlation between flavanol containing foods, like high cacao containing dark chocolate, there is not enough evidence yet to set a daily recommended amount to consume in order to reap positive heart health benefits.

In the meantime, chocolate can still be part of an overall heart healthy diet. Simply enjoy moderate portions of chocolate (e.g., 1 ounce) up to a few times per week, and make sure to include adequate amounts of other flavonoid-rich foods, like fruits (berries, apples and grapes) and vegetables (kale, broccoli and onion), in your diet each day.

— Lindsay Wilson, MS, RD, LD

Dietitian's Dish

Personal Strawberry Mug Cake

Yield: 1 oversized mug

Ingredients

- 5 ½ tbsp all-purpose flour
- 4 tbsp granulated sugar
- ½ tsp baking powder
- 1 egg
- 3 tbsp milk
- 3 tbsp oil
- 2 strawberries, each diced into 4-5 pieces

Directions

1. Combine all ingredients (except strawberries) in an oversized, microwave-safe coffee mug.
2. Mix thoroughly with a small whisk or fork until batter is smooth.
3. Gently place strawberry pieces on top of the batter.
4. Microwave for 1 ½ minutes*.
5. Check doneness by inserting a toothpick into the center of the cake. If wet batter or crumbs stick to the toothpick, additional cooking time is required.

*Depending on your microwave wattage, you may need to cook the cake for an additional 30 seconds or more until cake is done.

6. Allow to cool then enjoy!

Have a tasty recipe to share? Submit your recipe to dietitian@austin.utexas.edu for a chance to get featured in our next edition.

Ask the Expert



Q:

I've read on the CDC website that adults at any age who have heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease, or cardiomyopathies, are at increased risk of severe illness from the virus that causes COVID-19. What can I do as a healthy young adult to help lower my risk of heart disease?

A:

February is American Heart Month, so it's the perfect time to learn about your risk for heart disease and the steps you can take now to help your heart at any age!

1. Make heart-healthy changes to your diet.

- Eat food low in trans-fat, saturated fat, added sugar and sodium.
- Try to fill at least half your plate with vegetables and fruits.
- Aim for low sodium food and beverage options.

2. Control conditions that increase risk.

Work with a health care professional to keep blood pressure and cholesterol within normal levels.

3. Don't smoke.

If you don't smoke, don't start. If you do smoke, learn how to quit.

4. Stay physically active.

Get moving for at least 150 minutes per week.

For more detailed information and resources, visit the American Heart Association at heart.org.

Submit your nutrition-related questions to dietitian@austin.utexas.edu and our experts may answer you in a future edition.

Nourishing Noms



Feature Food: Strawberries

The heart-shaped silhouette of strawberries is the first clue that the fruit is good for you. This sweet berry can help protect your heart by helping to increase HDL (good) cholesterol and lower blood pressure.



Nutrition and Health Benefits

- Strawberries are sodium free, fat free, cholesterol free and low in calories.
- They are a good source of vitamin C – one serving (8 berries) actually contains more vitamin C than an orange!

Selection

- Choose berries that are firm, plump and have a deep red color with bright green caps attached.
- Once picked, strawberries do not ripen further so avoid those that are dull, or have green or yellow patches, white shoulders or seedy tips.

Storage

- Store in the refrigerator for 1–3 days.
- Do not wash strawberries or remove the caps until ready to eat.

Fun Fact

Strawberries, often dipped in chocolate, are a common Valentine's Day treat. This is due to their history in Ancient Rome, where the fruit was considered the symbol of Venus, the goddess of love, due to its bright red color and enticing taste.

