



## Did someone say Chocolate?

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58 million pounds of **chocolate** candy will be purchased the week before **Valentine's Day**. In addition to the \$345 million spent on **chocolate** for **Valentine's Day**, an additional \$103 million will be spent on other **Valentine's Day** candies like candy hearts. That is a lot of candy.

There is a body of research that suggests chocolate, not just dark chocolate, has health benefits. And, what goes best with chocolate? Well, T'ai Chi, of course. And, it appears that chocolate is good for the body and the brain. We know that chocolate is good for the soul. It just makes us feel better.

### The 5 Benefits of Chocolate

#### 1. Maintaining Heart Health

Chocolate can play a key role in reducing your risk of heart disease. And it doesn't take much. One study found that adults who ate slightly less than an ounce of chocolate each day had lower rates of heart disease than those who didn't eat any. More research is needed but the initial results are promising.

#### 2. Controlling Cholesterol

Chocolate's antioxidants seem to protect against plaque buildup on your artery walls, too. A study in the Journal of Nutrition linked regular chocolate consumption with reduced LDL cholesterol, the unhealthy type that builds up in arteries. Two elements of chocolate—stearic and oleic acid—are thought to be the ingredients that keep cholesterol levels in check. Here,

dark chocolate has the advantage: Comparative studies have linked darker chocolate to the strongest cholesterol-lowering effects.

### 3. Easing Blood Pressure

Eating a small square of chocolate that contains 50 to 70% cocoa on a daily basis can help lower your blood pressure, especially if you have hypertension. When blood pressure—the force pushing out on your artery walls—remains high for a long time, arteries become stretched and even damaged. Chocolate combats this with flavonoids, nutrients that have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant powers. These cause blood vessels to dilate, improving blood flow to the brain and heart and reducing blood pressure

### 4. Preventing Cognitive Decline

Drinking two cups of hot chocolate each day can improve brain health and prevent memory decline. A Harvard Medical School study showed that chocolate increased blood flow in particular areas of the brain, improving cognitive function in adults. Research has also shown that people who consume chocolate each day have improved attention, memory, and executive function.

### 5. Maintaining a Healthy Weight

Regularly eating chocolate can actually help you make healthy diet choices. Researchers from the University of Copenhagen found that after eating chocolate, particularly the darker version, people experienced fewer cravings for sweet, salty, and fatty foods, and they felt more satiated overall. This means indulging in a bit of dark chocolate on a regular basis can not only leave you feeling happy and satisfied—it can also help you stick to a healthy diet.

This article is excerpted from Health Grades article by Allison Firestone.