



Linda's T'ai Chi Weekly Handout November 13, 2022

Did Someone say, 'Chocolate'?"



Chocolate dates back to the earliest of cultures

At the mere mention of “chocolate” and most people’s eyes light-up. Although chocolate is known for its taste, it is also a good source of nutrients when in its pure form (dark chocolate) and eaten in moderation,

This well-loved food, once called the "drink of the gods" by the Mayan people, has a rich history as well. Chocolate comes from the seeds of the cacao pod, which grows on the cacao tree. *Theobroma cacao* is native to the tropical rainforests of Central America, where it has grown for thousands of years.

It was likely cultivated by the Olmecs and Maya peoples about 2,500 years ago. By about 2,000 years ago, the Maya were experienced cacao bean farmers, and were fond of grinding them up for a refreshing hot beverage. Aztecs later continued this love of chocolate, and the Spanish then discovered the drink in the 1500s and passed it around the world.

Chocolate arrived in Florida on a Spanish ship in 1641, and it’s thought the first American chocolate house opened in Boston in 1682. By 1773, cocoa beans were a major American colony import and chocolate was enjoyed by people of all classes.

During the Revolutionary War, chocolate was provided to the military as rations and sometimes given to soldiers as payment instead of money. Chocolate was also provided as rations to soldiers during World War II.

Both dark and light chocolate have health benefits as well. It can play a key role in reducing risk of heart disease. The antioxidants in chocolate seem to protect against plaque build-up on our arteries. A study in the Journal of Nutrition linked regular chocolate consumption with reduced LDL cholesterol. Darker chocolate seems to be more effective.

Chocolate also seems to help lower blood pressure. Another study by Harvard Medical School showed that chocolate increased blood flow in particular areas of the brain improving cognitive functioning in adults. It seems to improve attention, memory and executive function if eaten on a daily basis.

A few more interesting facts about chocolate:

The Aztecs and Mayans used chocolates as money to buy things.

The Aztec kings drank more than tens of cups of hot chocolate in a day.

In ancient times, chocolate was known as the 'food of Gods'.

The early people only 'drank' chocolate; they did not 'eat' chocolate until the first chocolate bars were manufactured in Switzerland in the year 1819.

Just as caffeine is known to energize people, chocolates are believed to make people happy.

The Chocolates contain a wide range of nutrients including vitamins such as Vitamin-B and minerals such as potassium, calcium and iron.

So, during our break at T'ai Chi, drink some water to stay hydrated and do indeed, have a piece of chocolate. When it comes to super foods, I could have chosen broccoli. Aren't you glad I chose chocolate?

Peace,

Linda