

Cardiovascular Benefits of Dark Chocolate?

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Abstract

The use of cacao for health benefits dates back at least 3000 years. Our understanding of cacao has evolved with modern science. It is now felt based on extensive research the main health benefits of cacao stem from epicatechin, a flavanol found in cacao. The process of manufacturing dark chocolate retains epicatechin, whereas milk chocolate does not contain significant amounts of epicatechin. Thus, most of the current research studies are focused on dark chocolate. Both epidemiological and clinical studies suggest a beneficial effect of dark chocolate on blood pressure, lipids, and inflammation. Proposed mechanisms underlying these benefits include enhanced nitric oxide bioavailability and improved mitochondrial structure/function. Ultimately, further studies of this promising compound are needed to elucidate its potential for prevention and treatment of cardiovascular and metabolic diseases as well as other diseases that have underlying mechanisms of mitochondrial dysfunction and nitric oxide deficiency.

Keywords: Cocoa; Dark chocolate; Epicatechin; Flavanols; Mitochondria; Skeletal muscle.

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