

Q. Is chocolate healthy?

A. Craving something sweet? You might be tempted to chow down on a chocolate candy bar from the vending machine. Or maybe you can barely resist a piece of that chocolate cake.

Can you justify it as a healthy choice? Drop the candy bar, and put down the fork. Here's what you need to know.

A lot of people believe chocolate is healthy. That's probably one reason the average adult eats 11 pounds of chocolate a year. And the claim is partly true.

But here's the problem with eating a lot of chocolate. Most chocolate bars, desserts, and treats have no nutritional value. Know what they do have? A lot of empty calories and high amounts of sugar and fat. Nosh your way through a chocolate treat, and you're mainly eating the ingredients for future health problems like obesity and diabetes.

But that doesn't mean you have to live your life sans chocolate. Eating a small amount of dark chocolate may actually be good for you. Researchers believe flavonols and antioxidants in dark chocolate may help:

- Lower the risk for diabetes and insulin resistance¹
- Prevent stiff arteries to improve heart health²



- Reduce stress and inflammation linked to chronic disease
- Control blood pressure and lower risk of heart disease³
- Improve mood, memory, and the immune system⁴
- Support weight management and lower Body Mass Index⁵

A bite of dark chocolate for better health

If you're craving something sweet, try fruit. Bananas, berries, pears, apples, and oranges contain natural sugars. And they're lower in calories than that chocolate bar or cake.

But if you've got chocolate on your mind, try dark chocolate. The darker, the better. One recent meta-analysis⁶ found

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that 45 grams is the ideal amount of chocolate each week.

You can eat half of a small square (about 6 grams) a day. Or, you can eat a whole square 4 days a week. It's just enough to help you tap in to the health benefits of dark chocolate without consuming a lot of calories. But it does add over 200 calories to your weekly intake, so plan to walk an extra 15 minutes for each square you eat.

References

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