

MMMM...CHOCOLATE!



It is that time of the year and would be remiss of me to let it go past without talking about one of the most loved (and hated!) foods on the planet – CHOCOLATE!

Easter means different things to different people. Its most obvious origins are that pertaining to Jesus Christ and/or other religious beliefs. For many of us that don't have a strong religious faith it is more about time with family. Irrespective of your reason for celebrating Easter, chocolate seems to be the thing most of us have in common!

Chocolate is Good!

I am pro chocolate! I love the way it tastes and I love the way it makes me feel. I now even love that fact that there are some incredible health benefits of dark chocolate. But it wasn't always like that...

When I was in my young and dumb personal trainer phase of my life I would not only neglect myself of one of the greatest pleasures of life but I would punish my clients with no mercy for consuming it. If any of those people are reading this article I apologise for my ignorance! At one point I remember receiving an email from one of my clients as a desperate attempt for her to change my attitude towards chocolate. It went like this:

It was headed; "Chocolate is a Vegetable" and then proceeded as follows:

1. Chocolate is derived from cocoa beans. **Beans = vegetables.**
2. Sugar is derived from either sugar cane or sugar beets. Both of them are plants, in the vegetable category. **Sugar = vegetables**
3. Thus **chocolate is a vegetable** and a healthy food!



How could I argue with that logic?! Maybe it was time for me to do some research!

The health benefits of dark chocolate

As much as the email (above) that my client sent me was a joke, it is actually true. Chocolate is made from plants, which means it contains many of the health benefits of dark vegetables. These benefits are from flavonoids, which act as antioxidants. Antioxidants protect the body from aging caused by free radicals, which can cause damage that leads to heart disease, cancer and many other modern diseases. Dark chocolate contains a large number of antioxidants (nearly 8 times the number found in strawberries). Flavonoids

also help relax blood pressure through the production of nitric oxide, and balance certain hormones in the body.

Heart Health Benefits of Dark Chocolate

Dark chocolate is good for your heart. A small 60-100g bar (70% cocoa) everyday can help keep your heart and cardiovascular system running well.

Two heart health benefits of dark chocolate are:

- **Lower Blood Pressure:** Studies have shown that consuming a small bar of dark chocolate everyday can reduce blood pressure in individuals with high blood pressure.
- **Lower Cholesterol:** Dark chocolate has also been shown to reduce LDL cholesterol (the bad cholesterol) by up to 10 percent.

Other Benefits of Dark Chocolate

It is sounding good so far! What else?

- it tastes good
- It feeds your soul
- it stimulates endorphin production, which gives a feeling of pleasure
- it contains serotonin, which acts as an anti-depressant
- it contains theobromine, caffeine and other substances which are stimulants

Doesn't chocolate have a lot of fat?

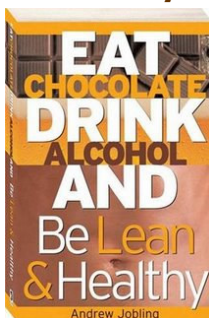
Here is some more good news - some of the fats in chocolate do not impact your cholesterol. The fats in chocolate are 1/3 oleic acid, 1/3 stearic acid and 1/3 palmitic acid:

- **Oleic Acid** is a healthy monounsaturated fat that is also found in olive oil.
- **Stearic Acid** is a saturated fat but one which research shows has a neutral effect on cholesterol.
- **Palmitic Acid** is also a saturated fat, one which may raise cholesterol and heart disease risk.



However there is no evidence that eating chocolate raises cholesterol levels.

What are you waiting for? Eat the good stuff



With all that great news, why not enjoy chocolate this Easter and regularly throughout the rest of your life? Choose only the best quality chocolate as the cheap stuff is a poor imitation and will do more harm than good. Of course like everything, we can over do our quality chocolate health kick, so consume it within reason and don't go blaming me and say that Andrew said chocolate is like eating vegetables and I need 5-8 serves per day!!

Having said that; eat and enjoy it this Easter and know deep inside that good quality dark chocolate is an important part of a happy and healthy life.