

## Power of Chocolate

Chocolate, which was labelled as 'Food of the Gods' by ancient Mayans and has been a delicacy for hundreds of years, only recently has been recognized as functional food as it provides health-promoting and/or disease-preventing property beyond the basic nutrition it contains.

Cocoa and chocolate products are among the most concentrated sources of procyanidin flavonoids, catechin and epicatechin (J Am Coll Nut, Oct 2001). Flavonoid is an antioxidant chemical which helps prevent cell damage reduces clot formation and improves blood sugar levels. Chocolate also contains an antioxidant called polyphenol - associated with reducing the risk of heart disease. A 1.4 ounce (40 gram) chocolate bar contains around 250 mg of polyphenol, about the amount in half a glass of red wine. Cocoa powder contains the highest amount of polyphenol, followed by dark chocolate, while white chocolate contains none.



Cocoa products are excellent sources of catechins which can also be found in green tea. They are believed to protect humans from cancers (gastric, esophageal, skin cancers), fight viruses, slow aging and reduce the risk of heart disease. The darker and bitter the chocolate, the more catechins content it contains.

50-57% of the whole cocoa bean is cocoa butter, of which 34% is stearic acid, a saturated fat we are taught to avoid. However, a research conducted by the Pennsylvania State University found that when subjects consumed a 1.4 ounce chocolate bar in place of a high carbohydrate snack, chocolate does not raise bad cholesterol (LDL) levels, but rather increases HDL levels. HDL is also known as 'good' cholesterol as high levels of HDL seem to protect against heart attack.

So, choose smart, eat smart! Choose dark chocolate (ones containing 70% or more cocoa) and keep the size to 1.4 ounces (40gram) at a time, a size which calories can be burned by a 20- minute workout. Alternatively, try chocolate with soy filling to increase the isoflavone intake, a chemical component found in soy, which believe to help alleviate menopausal symptoms, heart disease and osteoporosis.

By taking good control of your health through smart choices with balance and moderation, you can enjoy chocolate as a functional food, with a lot of promising health benefits.

**Charmain Tan**  
**Registered Dietitian (USA)**

E-mail: [ctan@my17.com](mailto:ctan@my17.com)

The above is for informational purposes only, and is not intended to diagnose or provide treatment for any conditions. You should consult a healthcare professional if you have any health concerns. The above is provided by the registered dietitian, 'VOle' and China Resources Vanguard (Hong Kong) Co. Ltd. shall not be liable for any errors or delays in the content, or for any actions taken in reliance thereon.