

PENNY SAVER NEWS HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

FAX: 932-5261 5339 S. County Road 579

August 23, 2003 Seffner, FL 33584-3334

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D. PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776

Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

e-mail:makeith@mail.ifas.ufl.edu

A Chocolate a Day to Keep the Doctor Away?

At least that's what the chocolate manufacturer's would have you believe. The stories are that eating dark chocolate will relax your blood vessels and keep your blood pressure down. Many brands are now advertising their percent real chocolate, percent cocoa or percent cacao on the labels. So, is it time to buy chocolate by the boxful and not feel guilty about it? Not quite.

The basis of the wishful thinking is that yes, some studies have found that the polyphenols and flavenols in chocolate do relax the walls of our arteries. And yes, that can lead to lowered blood pressure. But even the editor of the journal where the scientific report was published had some doubts about the real value of the report. Here's why.

Plain, pure cocoa beans are unbearably bitter. And they don't taste much like the chocolate we're used to today. But they do have lots of active ingredients, those polyphenols and flavenols. However, to make cocoa taste like chocolate it has to be roasted, ground up and then sloshed back and forth in huge vats for hours. That develops the chocolate flavor. How fast and how long it is sloshed back and forth has a big effect on the final flavor. That process also has a big effect on how many of those active ingredients survive.

In the standard, old fashioned processing, not many active ingredients survive the heat and air in the roasting and sloshing. Then, to make the chocolate 'good', we add sugar to cover up the bitterness and milk to make it milder. We might take out some of the cocoa fat (the butter) and add vegetable oil so that it doesn't melt as easily. And of course, nuts, crispies, caramel and all kinds of other things go into the pot too.

All these dilute the chocolate.

By the time a commercial candy bar is made there are very few active polyphenols or flavenols still present. Even commercial dark chocolate bars have much less active ingredient than the original. But the chocolate that is used in most of the research is not commercially made. It's very dark chocolate, often bitter. One doctor who was a participant in the most recent study said afterwards that the dark chocolate used in that study was so bitter, eating it was worse than taking medicine!

In some cases they just extract those active ingredients and give them as a pill, without the rest of the chocolate. That way at least they know exactly how much active ingredient, and which active ingredients, the people in the study are getting.

But the most recent study did not measure how much active ingredient was in the bitter chocolate they gave their subjects. So, while the people ate a 3.5 ounce piece of bitter chocolate every day, there's no measure of the active ingredients. And that means there's no way to tell how many commercial bars you would have to eat to get the same amount of activity.

Unfortunately, to go along with all that active ingredient you would also get lots of fat and sugar as well as other flavorings, plus milk if you don't like dark chocolate. That's more calories than most of us can afford on a daily basis.

If you do like dark chocolate, then one small piece a day isn't going to hurt. Look for what has the most real chocolate, highest % cocoa or cacao, and the fewest other ingredients. And please, stick to just a few ounces a day!

Here's a chocolate bread with a secret ingredient that lowers the fat and raises the fiber. If you don't tell, they'll never guess. If you use half Splenda to cut the calories, use an 8 x 4" pan. Enjoy!

Chocolate Snack Bread

½ C applesauce

1/3 C shortening (trans fat free)

2 eggs or equal amount of substitute

1/3 C water

1 1/4 cups sugar (or half Splenda/half sugar) 1 1/2 C all purpose flour
1/3 C baking cocoa 1 tsp baking soda
3/4 tsp salt 1/4 tsp baking powder
1 C (6 oz) semisweet chocolate chips 1/3 C chopped nuts optional

Preheat oven to 350° F. Grease and flour a 9 x 5" loaf pan. In mixing bowl combine applesauce, shortening, eggs, water and sugar. Beat on low speed for 30 seconds. In separate bowl mix all dry ingredients except chips and nuts. Add dry ingredients gradually to applesauce mixture, beat on low for 30 seconds then on high for 2 1/2 minutes. Scrape bowl occasionally. Fold in chips and nuts. Transfer batter to prepared pan and bake 60 to 70 minutes, until toothpick in center comes out clean. Cool in pan for 10 minutes, then remove from pan and allow to cool completely on wire rack.