

## LIVING

■ HEALTH ■

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# THE cacao QUOTIENT

The darker the chocolate, the healthier it is

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**C**hocolate doesn't have just a dark side anymore.

Recent studies show that chocolate, derived from the cacao (pronounced ke-kay-oh) bean, is rich in phytochemicals, which are plant-produced chemicals with protective properties thought to be beneficial to humans as well.

Call it the "light" side of chocolate.

Some of these phytochemicals are flavanols and are antioxidant in nature. Antioxidants protect the body's cells from destructive disease such as cancer, and, in essence, keep them from rusting.

"To provide perspective, the antioxidant capacity of dark chocolate and cocoa rival red wine and green tea, two of the most powerful antioxidant foods known," said Dr. Ann Kulze, nutrition expert and author of the book "Dr. Ann's 10-Step Diet: A Simple Plan for Permanent Weight Loss and Lifelong Vitality."

Flavanols are said to have anti-allergic, anti-cancer and anti-viral properties. Numerous studies link flavanols to lowered blood pressure, decreased blood clotting and

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## FANTASIES IN CHOCOLATE

Fantasies in Chocolate, the annual fundraiser for the Reno Gazette-Journal Foundation, is 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. Nov. 1 in the Summit Pavilion of Grand Sierra Resort. Tickets are \$65. \$75 at the door; call 800-648-3568. VIP tables for 10 people are \$900. Call 788-6434.

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# Chocolate/Check how much cacao is in your bar

From IC

improved blood flow.

"Emerging science reveals (that flavanols) protect the health of the cardiovascular system," said Kulze of South Carolina, who includes dark chocolate as one of the five foods in her daily diet, the others being red wine, green tea, nuts and berries. "These antioxidant flavanols have favorable effects on the inner most lining cells of our arteries."

Milk chocolate, white chocolate and instant cocoa have not been shown to have the same benefits as dark chocolate either because of processing or lower cacao levels. And even though higher cacao content in chocolate means there should be a higher antioxidant level, other aspects come into play. The National Confections Associations said the type of bean used, other ingredients in the chocolate bar and how the candy is manufactured and stored can affect the antioxidant level. Of course, there is no antioxidant information available on bars.

"The antioxidant flavanols are sensitive to heat, so processing and cooking can diminish their activity and potential benefits," Kulze said. "Studies have specifically shown that adding milk (as in milk chocolate) negates the beneficial vascular effects of flavanols."

Other phytochemicals in chocolate are said to boost the mood, stimulate the nervous system and improve the memory. These phytochemicals are called phenylethylamine, or PEA, theobromine and epicatechin, respectively. Phenylethylamine is more

## DID YOU KNOW?

■ National Chocolate Day is celebrated Oct. 28, according to the National Confectioners Association.

■ For a tour of the Kimmie Candy Co. in Reno, see [www.kimmiecandy.com](http://www.kimmiecandy.com). Tours are available 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Call 284-9200 at least one day in advance to make a reservation.

effective than Prozac, according to Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, a board-certified internist and author of the book "From Fatigued to Fantastic."

"Chocolate is a mood elevator. It's really good stuff," he said. "It's going to lift your mood."

Theobromine, the "chocolate equivalent of caffeine," is "gentler."

"It gives you a nice, alert feeling without leaving you edgy," he said.

According to a study summarized in the Journal of Neuroscience, epicatechin, also found in green tea and blueberries, showed improved memory in mice, especially when coupled with exercise.

"First of all, the healthiest chocolate would be the dark chocolate," said Teitelbaum of Hawaii. "The higher percentage of cacao, the better. The more sugar in it, the less good it is. If people want to have their cake and eat it too, go ahead and get sugar-free chocolate: Some of it tastes like cardboard, but some of it is good. I recommend Russell Stover's sugar-free chocolate."

"Dark chocolate is here to stay," said Becky Cavender, owner of Sweets Handmade

Candies, both in Reno and Truckee. "The news about it keeps getting better and better."

## Check the ingredients

Chocolate marketers are noticing the benefits of dark chocolate and clearly relaying this to consumers through marketing.

Ghirardelli's "Espresso Escape," for example, contains 60 percent cacao, indicated once in the middle front of the wrapper. Lindt's "Creation 70%" bar contains 70 percent chocolate from the cacao bean, a fact denoted twice on the front of the wrapper. Lindt's "Excellence" bar contains 85 percent cacao, an amount noted in large type on the front.

But other candies, such as Cadbury's Caramello, Milky Way and even the Snickers "Dark" bar make no mention of the cacao content at all, not even in the nutrition panel on the back. Yet, chocolate is the primary ingredient. In the United States, chocolate manufacturers are not required to provide the percent cacao as they are in European countries, according to the National Confectioners Association.

When a call was placed to Hershey's to research the cacao content in a York Peppermint Patty, the information was unavailable. A spokeswoman returned the call to say that that information could not be relayed because it was of interest to competitors.

But what about consumers, the people eating the bars? Wouldn't this information be beneficial to someone looking to make a smart choice? It leaves the consumer wondering

if the bars that don't list cacao content just don't have much chocolate in them at all.

Teitelbaum likens such bars to "painted gold" and "chocolate-like food substances."

"Call the company, and if they don't give you the (cacao) amount, throw it in the trash," he said. "If they can't tell you the amount of chocolate in their product, how can you tell they're making something that doesn't kill you?"

## More cacao, less sugar

Whatever you choose, go for something with more cacao. Chocolate bars that have less cacao typically contain more sugar, which can pack on calories. Contrast Dove's Dark Chocolate bar, with 63 percent cacao and 12 grams of sugar per serving, against a Snickers bar, cacao content not marked, and sugar at 30 grams.

"Your sugar-to-chocolate ratio is going way up in (the bars where cacao content is not listed)," Teitelbaum said. "Check the ingredient list and see where sugar is in the list. The first ingredient there is the most of and so on. What I would recommend is finding a dark chocolate and going for quality and not quantity. Spend your food budget on the best chocolates you can find. It's worth a little bit extra."

Sugar is added to cacao, which is very bitter, to make cacao palatable, according to Joe Dutra, president of Kimmie Candy Co., a chocolate manufacturer in Reno. "Sugar is fairly cheap (to cacao) comparatively," he said. "That's why the cheapest candies are things made strictly out of sugar."

This is why Kulze recommends consuming chocolate with at least 60 percent cacao content

— consumers get a palatable bar with some antioxidant value. Chocolate with 85 percent or more cacao might be too bitter.

"My best advice is to regularly include a small amount (a half to two ounces) of the highest cacao content one's palette accepts," Kulze said. "In the context of health, it's important that this indulgence replace a less beneficial food and does not tip the scales of energy balance towards caloric excess, i.e., any benefit would be wiped out if one gained weight as a result."

Teitelbaum summed it up this way: There is food that tastes good, but is not good for you and food that tastes good for you and is healthy.

"In a world full of some wonderful things to choose from, I'm going to pick from the pile of foods that taste great and are healthy for us," he said.