

Cocoa flavanols lower blood pressure and increase blood vessel function in healthy people

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Naturally occurring cocoa flavanols are largely destroyed by most cocoa processing methods. The cocoa flavanol drink test materials used in these studies supplied by Mars, Incorporated were extracted using a patented process from fresh cocoa beans. Credit: Mars, Incorporated

Two recently published studies in the journals *Age* and the *British Journal of Nutrition* (BJN) demonstrate that consuming cocoa flavanols improves cardiovascular function and lessens the burden on the heart that comes with the ageing and stiffening of arteries. The studies also provide novel data to indicate that intake of cocoa flavanols reduces the risk of developing cardiovascular disease (CVD).

As we age, our [blood vessels](#) become less flexible and less able to expand to let blood flow and circulate normally, and the risk of hypertension also increases. Arterial stiffness and blood vessel dysfunction are linked with cardiovascular disease—the number one cause of deaths worldwide. "With the world population getting older, the incidence of cardiovascular disease, [heart](#) attacks and stroke will only increase," says Professor Malte Kelm, Professor of Cardiology, Pulmonary Diseases and Vascular Medicine at University Hospital Düsseldorf and Scientific Director of FLAVIOLA. "It is therefore pivotal that we understand the positive impact diet can have on [cardiovascular disease risk](#). As part of this, we want to know what role flavanol-containing foods could play in maintaining the health of the heart and blood vessels."

Cocoa flavanols are plant-derived bioactives from the cacao bean. Dietary intake of flavanols has been shown to have a beneficial effect on cardiovascular health but the compounds are often destroyed during normal food processing. Earlier studies have demonstrated that [cocoa](#) flavanol intake improves the elasticity of blood vessels and lowers blood pressure—but, for the most part, these investigations have focused on high-risk individuals like smokers and people that have already been diagnosed with conditions like hypertension and [coronary heart disease](#). These two studies in *Age* and BJN are the first to look at the different effects dietary [cocoa flavanols](#) can have on the blood vessels of healthy, low-risk individuals with no signs or symptoms of [cardiovascular disease](#).

Cocoa flavanols increase blood vessel flexibility and lower blood pressure

In the study published in Age, two groups of 22 young (

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