

# New study indicates weekly consumption of chocolate lowers the risk for diabetes

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Credit: University of Maine

New research from the Maine-Syracuse Longitudinal Study (MSLS) confirms that persons who eat chocolate at least once a week have a lower prevalence of diabetes and are at lower risk for a diagnosis of diabetes four to five years later.

The study also indicates that the relation between the frequency of

[chocolate consumption](#) may be due to an active choice on the part of diabetics. For example, diabetics may choose to reduce their frequency of chocolate consumption in an effort to reduce sweets, noted the researchers, who published their findings in the journal *Appetite*.

The research team is led by nutritionist and psychologist Georgina Crichton of the University of South Australia, and University of Maine psychology researchers Merrill "Pete" Elias, Peter Dearborn and Michael Robbins. The research was supported by the National Institutes of Health and the National Health and Medical Research Council, Australia.

The MSLS study of 908 community-dwelling nondiabetic and 45 diabetic participants found that persons who ate chocolate less than once a week were at twice the risk of [diabetes mellitus](#) compared to those who ate chocolate more than once a week. Consumption more than once a week did not decrease risk further.

Persons who never or rarely ate chocolate had almost twice the risk of having diabetes five years later, compared to those who ate chocolate more than once per week.

Cause and effect relations between chocolate consumption and diabetes have not been established in any study in the literature, but in their research, the MSLS investigators concluded that a bidirectional relationship couldn't be ruled out, modest amounts of chocolate protect against diabetes, but some diabetic individuals chose to eat modest amounts of chocolate.

After 2000, when the [health benefits](#) of chocolate became more widely known, persons who ate moderate amounts of chocolate had less incidence of developing diabetes. Indeed, the study shows that the number of new cases of diabetes mellitus did not rise significantly for the next four to five years.

The MSLS investigators emphasize that their data do not argue against a causal relation between eating chocolate and developing diabetes. But they point out that the direction of the association may be reversed in some individuals.

"Regardless of the direction of the relation between chocolate consumption and [diabetes](#) mellitus, consuming chocolate at least once a week very much appears to be a win-win with regard to health benefits and cognitive performance for those who do not have special health restrictions on chocolate," says Elias, who directs MSLS.

In the MSLS study, specific quantities of chocolate eaten were not measured. However, findings from a number of studies would suggest that a moderate consumption of approximately one ounce (or 25 grams) of chocolate once a week, i.e. about a third of a typical chocolate bar, may be associated with health benefits, such as reduced arterial stiffness and better cognitive performance.

It is unclear if the benefits of chocolate are limited to dark chocolate. It is widely hypothesized that the cocoa flavanols, found in larger amounts in dark chocolate, are responsible for its health and cognitive benefits. Elias points out that clinical trials are necessary to establish whether only [dark chocolate](#) is beneficial.

This is the latest collaborative study involving the University of Maine and University of South Australia researchers using MSLS to examine the health benefits of [chocolate](#), including increased cognitive function.

**More information:** Georgina E. Crichton et al. Habitual chocolate intake and type 2 diabetes mellitus in the Maine-Syracuse Longitudinal Study: (1975–2010): Prospective observations, *Appetite* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.appet.2016.10.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2016.10.008)

Provided by University of Maine

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