

# For students' healthy snacking startup, it's all about chocolate

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Health by Chocolate Bakery's protein-infused candies come in three flavors—apple pie, birthday cake, and chocolate almond. Credit: Glanzman/Northeastern University

Ara Josefsson and Jaida Mercurio believe they have found the solution

to unhealthy snacking.

And it has nothing to do with kale, broccoli, or baby carrots.

For them, it's all about [chocolate](#).

As the co-founders of Health by Chocolate Bakery, Josefsson, DMSB'16, MS'17, and Mercurio, DMSB/AMD'21, have created a line of handcrafted chocolates that are both high in protein and low in fat and carbs. They come in three flavors—apple pie, birthday cake, and chocolate almond—and contain fewer than 50 calories apiece. The ingredients—organic, gluten-free, and antioxidant-rich—include [dark chocolate](#) and [white chocolate](#), coconut flakes and chia seeds, cinnamon and whey protein.

"There is absolutely nothing like this on the market," said Josefsson, who called the protein-infused candies the "snacking solution" for those looking for a healthy treat to sate their hunger between meals. "They're high-protein, low-calorie, and still taste good."

As it happens, it was Mercurio's own unhealthy snacking habit that led to the creation of Health by Chocolate Bakery. It was fall 2016 and she was a first-year student. As the daughter of a baker and a chef, she "started experimenting" with different combinations of ingredients, whipping up recipe after recipe in hopes of satiating her sweet tooth without consuming too much fat and sugar. In short order, she had created the chocolate almond bite—a rich, dark chocolate treat filled with almond pieces and rolled in coconut flakes. Its macronutrient profile: seven grams of protein, one gram of fat, one gram of carbohydrate.

Mercurio asked Josefsson to try what she had made—and he liked it. They had met at the Marino Center, where they both worked as personal trainers and saw firsthand the difficulties of losing weight while

snacking on junk food. Thinking like an entrepreneur, Josefsson told Mercurio "Let's make a company out of this," and Health by Chocolate Bakery—a play on the popular phrase "death by chocolate"—was born.

The chocolates are available for sale online, but Josefsson and Mercurio are in talks to start selling them at local bakeries. Mercurio also wants to sell them at her parents' restaurant, Fiddlestix Café, a breakfast and lunch joint in Cornwall, New York, that specializes in putting a creative spin on classic dishes. "Their big thing was being different," said Mercurio, who worked as a waitress at Fiddlestix Café for five years. "That's the main thing I kept in mind when I started this project."

Now Josefsson and Mercurio want to take Health by Chocolate Bakery to the next level. They have connected with IDEA, Northeastern's student-run venture accelerator, and are currently working to perfect a market research presentation in the hopes of receiving gap funding.

Their classroom experiences have informed their approach to running the startup. Mercurio, a second-year marketing and interactive media combined major, honed her understanding of concepts like costs of goods sold in her accounting class and has begun tracking her business finances in Excel. Josefsson—who earned his bachelor's degree in international business and his master's in international management—praised his service marketing and business strategy courses for teaching him "how to best validate a product and scale it upward." "What I learned," he said, "is that successful ideas provide long-term solutions to problems that impact a large number of people."

Josefsson, who works in marketing and business development at a Boston-based health and technology company called Wellable, said knowing how to scale Health by Chocolate Bakery will come in handy in the future, when order volume increases and the business grows. Today the entrepreneurs-on-the-rise are working to promote their startup on

[Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#). They're also looking to expand their product line to include cookies, muffins, and seasonal varieties of the bite-size candies, including gingerbread for the winter and pumpkin pie for the fall.

"The product is really good, it solves a serious problem, and people seem to enjoy it," said Mercurio.

Provided by Northeastern University

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