

Chocolate is good for the heart

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Eating chocolate at least once a week is linked with a reduced risk of heart disease, according to research published today in the *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology*, a journal of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC).¹

"Our study suggests that chocolate helps keep the heart's blood vessels

healthy," said study author Dr. Chayakrit Krittanawong of Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas.

"In the past, [clinical studies](#) have shown that chocolate is beneficial for both blood pressure and the lining of blood vessels," he continued. "I wanted to see if it affects the blood vessels supplying the heart (the coronary [arteries](#)) or not. And if it does, is it beneficial or harmful?"

The researchers conducted a combined analysis of studies from the past five decades examining the association between chocolate consumption and [coronary artery](#) disease (the blockage of the coronary arteries). The analysis included six studies with a total of 336,289 participants who reported their chocolate consumption.

During a median follow-up of nearly nine years, 14,043 participants developed [coronary artery disease](#) and 4,667 had a heart attack (when coronary artery disease progresses and the flow of blood to the heart is suddenly blocked).

Compared with consuming chocolate less than once a week, eating chocolate more than once a week was associated with an 8% decreased risk of coronary artery disease.

Dr. Krittanawong said: "Chocolate contains [heart](#) healthy nutrients such as flavonoids, methylxanthines, polyphenols and stearic acid which may reduce inflammation and increase good cholesterol (high-density lipoprotein or HDL cholesterol)."

He noted that the study did not examine whether any particular type of chocolate is more beneficial and whether there is an ideal portion size. "Chocolate appears promising for prevention of coronary artery disease, but more research is needed to pinpoint how much and what kind of chocolate could be recommended," he said.

While it's not clear how much chocolate is optimal, Dr. Krittanawong warned against overeating. He said: "Moderate amounts of [chocolate](#) seem to protect the coronary arteries but it's likely that large quantities do not. The calories, sugar, milk, and fat in commercially available products need to be considered, particularly in diabetics and obese people."

More information: Krittanawong C, Narasimhan B, Wang Z, et al. Association between chocolate consumption and risk of coronary artery disease: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Eur J Prev Cardiol.* 2020. [DOI: 10.1177/2047487320936787](https://doi.org/10.1177/2047487320936787).

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