

# In moderation, chocolate may be beneficial to health, prevention of coronary artery disease

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Historians credit Richard Cadbury, son of chocolatier John Cadbury,

with the invention in 1861 of heart-shaped boxes filled with chocolates. The box—after the candy was consumed—was intended to store sentimental love letters or locks of hair, which were common practices in the Victorian era.

Of course chocolate has been around much longer than heart-shaped boxes for Valentine's Day. When first domesticated over 5,000 years ago in present-day Ecuador, [cocoa beans](#) were used to prepare a bitter-tasting beverage that was thought to give strength and sexual prowess to the drinker, according to Wikipedia. In fact, the Latin name for the tree that produces cocoa beans is *Theobroma cacao* L. which means "Food of Gods."

Time went on and in 16th century Europe someone added sugar to chocolate. And so here we are.

Contrary to popular opinion, chocolate is not an essential food group. It was, however, reported to be a vital part of rations for U.S. soldiers during the wars of the last century. And when it comes to nutrition, there is some good news for those of us who adore this beloved treat.

Cocoa beans, from which chocolate is made, are rich in substances called polyphenols. Among other benefits, these antioxidant compounds have been shown in [human studies](#) to improve the flow of blood through arteries and assist in keeping blood pressure under control. In general, more polyphenols reside in cocoa powder and baking chocolate, followed by dark chocolate, semi-sweet and [milk chocolate](#). And get this, chocolate has been identified as a polyphenol-rich food, along with tea and wine.

And while I wouldn't necessarily recommend we eat chocolate for its [nutrient content](#), it does contain a fair amount of essential minerals, including magnesium, iron and zinc.

Chocolate varies in [fat content](#) (check the label). But more than half the fat in products high in cocoa is in the form of healthful monounsaturated fats and stearic acid, a "good guy" saturated fat that may actually be good for our hearts, according to the USDA Food Data Central.

While scientists continue their grueling study of chocolate's attributes, several analyses of this most-loved food suggests that, eaten in moderation, chocolate may not be harmful but may actually bestow some benefits to our health, according to a 2021 review published in the journal, *Nutrients*.

How much is moderate? In 2021, researchers reporting in the *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology* calculated the association between [chocolate consumption](#) and the risk for [heart disease](#) in more than 300,000 people from six prospective studies. Their final tally was that "the benefits of nutrients in chocolate appear promising and chocolate consumption at least once a week may be beneficial for the prevention of coronary artery disease."

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