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Oswego County Opportunities, Inc.

Nutrition Services

Have a Heart-Healthy Valentine's Day, ... with Chocolate!

Chocolate is made from the cocoa bean, which is naturally rich in substances called flavanols. Flavanols work as a miniature army defending the cells in our body from outside damage. Flavanols may also help our heart by lowering blood pressure, improving blood flow to the brain and heart, and helping to prevent blood clots by making the cells in our blood less “sticky”. These flavanols are the same antioxidants that are found in other healthy foods like cranberries, apples, peanuts, onions, tea and red wine.

Since chocolate has gotten a bad reputation as being unhealthy for so many years, let's answer some common questions about the delicious food...

What kind of chocolate should I eat?

~ Answer: The darker the better! Dark chocolate keeps more of the healthy cocoa in it during processing, where milk chocolate often has lots of added fat and sugars. When looking for chocolate, purchase one with >60% cocoa to ensure it still contains all the heart-healthy qualities. Lindt® and Godiva® both make delicious versions.

Isn't the fat in chocolate bad for you?

~ Answer: Only 1/3 of the fat in dark chocolate is the unhealthy type. The rest is monounsaturated fat (the “good” kind found in olive oil), that can actually help lower your bad LDL cholesterol.

I can't eat chocolate if I'm diabetic because of all the sugar in it, right?

~ Answer: WRONG! Chocolate (especially dark chocolate) can be included in a healthy diabetic meal plan. The amount of carbohydrate in one square of dark chocolate is roughly the same as in one slice of bread. Plus, you still get all the good antioxidant benefits from the cocoa.

Doesn't chocolate have a lot of caffeine in it?

~ Answer: Not really. One square of chocolate has approximately 5 milligrams of caffeine in it. Compare this to an 8 ounce cup of coffee, which contains about 85 milligrams of caffeine. So rest assured, a small serving of chocolate will not make you hyper or keep you awake!

So, feel free share some chocolate with your sweetheart this Valentine's Day. Just make sure you pay attention to how much you are eating. A serving should be 1 ounce (or 1 square) at a time. Also, avoid choosing chocolate that has a lot of added sugars to it (the chewy caramel-marshmallow-nut-covered dark chocolate is by no means a heart-healthy food option).

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