

# Cocoa flavanols boost cognition, mood and cardiovascular health

written by Alan Frost, Founder and President of FlavaNaturals | September 20, 2022



*As a chocolate lover, I was getting fewer of the benefits and more of the extra calories even from 90% cocoa bars. Now with FlavaNaturals I'm assured of obtaining the full health dividends of cocoa flavanols along with great taste, with less fat and sugar. I throw some powder in with my decaf or a smoothie, and even use it to make chia chocolate pudding—I don't go a day without some!*

*—Dr. Ronald Hoffman*

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*"At no other time has Nature concentrated such a wealth of valuable nourishment into such a small space as in the cocoa bean"*

*—(Alexander Von Humboldt)*

## Flavanol Science Continues to Strengthen

The wealth of data supporting the benefits of daily cocoa flavanol consumption on cognition, mood, and cardiovascular health continues to accelerate. And most of the studies come from world-renowned research institutions, including Harvard, Columbia, and Northwestern.

A common thread among most flavanol studies demonstrating positive outcomes is the consumption of between 500mg and 1,000mg of cocoa flavanols daily,

regardless of how it is consumed. Participants in the majority of studies have consumed cocoa powder but other studies have used dark chocolate and even pills.

Below is a snapshot of some existing data demonstrating the benefits of cocoa flavanols on cognition, mood, and cardiovascular health.

### **Cognition and Cocoa Flavanols**

Cognitive functioning affects almost everything we do and the proven benefits of cocoa flavanols on cognition are compelling. One recent study by scientists at the University of Birmingham showed that healthy adults, aged 18 to 40, consuming 700mg of cocoa flavanols daily, performed cognitively challenging tasks 11% faster than the placebo group!

Another highly touted study from Columbia University showed a two-decade improvement in the speed to memory recall with daily consumption of a high-flavanol (900mg) cocoa drink. The Columbia study built on two prior, large placebo-controlled trials out of Europe showing significantly improved cognitive function in elderly populations

Of course, cognitive benefits with cocoa flavanols are not only seen in older populations. A compelling study published in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology* demonstrated important improvements in cognitive performance during sustained mental effort among young healthy adults with a median age of 21.

### **Mood, Stress, and Cocoa Flavanols**

Chocolate's favorable impact on mood has been discussed for centuries and recent scientific studies back this up. One study of 72 healthy adults conducted at Swinburne University revealed that daily consumption of a chocolate drink containing 500mg of cocoa flavanol antioxidants increased their calm and contentedness relative to a placebo group.

Another recent, placebo-controlled study published in *Antioxidants* showed a 29% reduction in cortisol, the hormone our brains trigger from our adrenal glands in response to stress (often called the stress hormone), following four weeks of high-flavanol chocolate consumption. Not surprisingly, persistently high cortisol levels are associated with mood impairment, weight gain, high blood pressure, sleep disruption, and reduced energy.

And in a less rigorous but informative observational study, a recent survey of 2,000 American women published in the *Journal of Nutrition Reviews*, 85% reported that chocolate makes them happy.

## Cardiovascular Health and Cocoa Flavanols

The cardiovascular benefits of cocoa flavanols are well studied and compelling, ranging from reducing the risk of cardiovascular death to supporting exercise performance. Below is a topline overview of cardiovascular benefits:

**Decrease Risk of Cardiovascular Events and Death:** Groundbreaking results are in from COSMOS, Harvard Medical School's massive 21,400-person, five-year, placebo-controlled study of daily cocoa flavanol consumption (500mg). Key findings include:

- 27% reduction in the risk of cardiovascular death (jumps to 39% in participants consuming cocoa flavanols at least 22 days per month!)
- 24% reduction in major cardiovascular events (heart attack, stroke, or death) among study participants consuming cocoa flavanols daily

**Improve Circulation:** One recent study published in the British Journal of Nutrition showed a remarkable 24% increase in flow mediated artery dilation (FMD), a measure of blood flow, just two hours after consuming 900mg of cocoa flavanols!

**Lower Blood Pressure and Cholesterol:** Numerous placebo-controlled studies of cocoa flavanols show meaningful reductions in both blood pressure and LDL cholesterol (bad cholesterol), while simultaneously raising HDL levels.

**Reduce Blood Sugar:** Four well-controlled studies show that cocoa flavanols lower blood sugar and improve insulin resistance in people without Diabetes. In fact, these studies show an average reduction in glucose levels of over 10%, and an average improvement in insulin resistance of nearly 40%!

**Support Exercise Performance:** Early studies suggest cocoa flavanols may support exercise performance. In fact, a recent 14-day study of cyclists by Patel et al. demonstrated improvements in oxygen intake and two-minute time trial performance.