

Leyla Weighs In: The benefits of cocoa flavanols



Chocolate lovers rejoice! Now you can have your chocolate and eat (and drink) it too thanks to the proven benefits of flavan-3-ols.

Flavonoids in foods are shown to confer a vast array of health-promoting benefits due to a synergy of antioxidants and anti-inflammatory, anti-carcinogenic and anti-mutagenic properties. The most consumed of the flavonoids in foods are the flavan-3-ols found primarily in green and black teas, berries, apples, pears, and chocolate.

The field of nutrition has come a long way in making recommendations not just based on prevention of deficiencies, but optimal intake for good health and a long life. Along those lines, a recent review of the scientific literature composed of 48 studies (of good methodological quality—out of an eligible 157 randomized control trials) completed by an expert panel put together by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, has shown vast benefits of consuming bioactive plant compounds like flavan-3-ols on health maintenance and disease mitigation, contributing to healthy aging.

The findings of the research indicate a daily dose of 400-600 mg of flavan-3-ols show modest benefits in reducing cardiovascular and metabolic risk factors such as high blood pressure, high blood sugar, insulin resistance, high cholesterol and

triglycerides. In fact, the most documented positive impact of flavan-3-ols is on vasculature—improving blood pressure and reducing arterial stiffness. This conclusion is supported by the recent COSMOS randomized clinical trial evaluating a dose of 500 mg/flavanols/d in approximately 21,000 older adults. Following this population for 3.6 years, researchers observed a 27% reduction in cardiovascular disease death and a 16% reduction in cardiovascular events such as heart attack and stroke.

While an 8-ounce cup of green and black tea provides a whopping 318 and 277 mg of flavan-3-ols, respectively, followed by a cup of blackberries delivering about 63 mgs, a couple of tablespoons of cocoa powder provides about 27 mg. Three squares of dark chocolate (at least 85% cocoa please!) provides nearly 20 mg of flavan-3-ols. The recommendation regarding chocolate is that it should have very little or no sugar at all for the greatest benefit.

This guideline is for the general adult population including healthy persons, overweight and obese individuals and those at risk of chronic diseases. And as with any comprehensive health assessment, proper dosage is encouraged to limit sugar and calories.

If you've been listening to our *Intelligent Medicine* podcast and radio show lately, you've no doubt heard Dr. Hoffman mention his new favorite dark chocolate: **FlavaNaturals**. Their delicious chocolate bars and drinks deliver 5 to 9 times the flavanols of your average dark chocolate. They're a great way to reap the benefits of flavan-3-ols!

To your health!