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Healthy Chocolate for Your Valentine

By Debra Lynn Dadd

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HEALTHY CHOCOLATE FOR YOUR VALENTINE

Let's face it. We're all going to eat chocolate for Valentine's Day. But there's no need to feel guilty! Chocolate is actually good for you...it's all the things added to it that are the problem. Here's how you can choose delicious healthy chocolates for your Valentine.

HEALTH BENEFITS

The gift of chocolate to a beloved as a token of love is more than just tradition. Naturally-occurring compounds in chocolate produce that mild euphoria of being in love and contribute to enjoyable interpersonal relations by elevating mood and enhancing sensory perception.

Beyond good feelings, chocolate benefits the body in many ways. In moderation, chocolate can contribute to heart health, help you live longer, suppress a chronic cough, and add needed magnesium to your diet. Chocolate even contains a high level of chromium, which can help control blood sugar.

Chocolate does NOT cause acne, most headaches, or hyperactivity, and does not raise cholesterol.

HEALTH PROBLEMS

While chocolate itself is fine to eat, there are some substances present in chocolate products that you should

watch out for.

Most chocolate products contain tremendous amounts of refined white sugar, which is harmful to health in many ways.

Chocolate may also contain pesticides. The EPA allows various levels of pesticide residue to be present in cocoa powder, and the FDA Total Diet Study found them in many chocolate products.

Many chocolates also contain the toxic metals cadmium and lead. "Significant levels" of these metals were found in 68% of the common chocolate products tested. There is no safe level for lead, and it is particularly harmful to children.

HEALTHY CHOCOLATE CHOICES

Here are some guidelines for choosing the healthiest chocolates.

1. Choose chocolates with the least amount of refined white sugar or other sweetener. Dark "bittersweet" chocolates with a high percentage of cocoa solids (usually the label will state the exact percentage) have less sugar than semisweet or milk chocolate and also have the greatest health benefits. Keep in mind that flavor additions, such as dried fruits and candied ginger may also add sugar to the chocolate.
2. Choose chocolates sweetened with evaporated cane juice or barley malt. If the evaporated cane juice used is the unprocessed whole juice of the cane, it acts in the body like a whole food and doesn't give a sugar rush. Barley malt is also a slow-release sweetener, noted on the label as "grain-sweetened."
3. Choose organic chocolates. Certified organic chocolate ensures there are no harmful pesticide residues.
4. Make your own chocolates. It's easy to make many chocolate delights yourself, with the exact ingredients you want. Start with unsweetened cocoa powder or baking chocolate and be creative!

SAVOR YOUR CHOCOLATE

Fine chocolate is one of those earthly pleasures to be savored. When eaten as a special treat, with full

appreciation, a little chocolate can go a long way.

Choose quality over quantity. If you are going to eat chocolate, eat really good chocolate. Then, for maximum enjoyment, give the taste of the chocolate your full attention, eat it at a time when you are not famished or overly full, and allow the chocolate to melt in your mouth to make the experience last.

Read more about healthy chocolate at <http://www.debraslist.com>.

Hailed as "The Queen of Green" by the New York Times, Debra Lynn Dadd has been a consumer advocate for products and lifestyle choices that are better for health and the environment since 1982. Visit her website for 100s of links to 1000s of nontoxic, natural and earthwise products, and to sign up for her free email newsletters. <http://www.dld123.com>

Chocolates - The Ultimate Thank You Gift

By Tyson J Stevenson

It's difficult to find someone who doesn't like chocolate. Maybe it's in some measure due to the fact that chocolate releases endorphins, the same neurotransmitters that make you feel good after you sneeze or have sex or fall in love. The nearly universal draw to chocolate makes chocolate, in any shape or form, an extremely popular gift. This is as true for children as it is for grandparents; who didn't love trick-or-treating when they were little or receiving a box of chocolates for Valentine's Day when they were older? Chocolate is a great gift for just about anyone, big or small.

Of course, all chocolate is not buildd equal. Though the mass-produced chocolates made by companies like M&M, Mars, and Hershey's taste good, they're really nothing compared to gourmet chocolate. It's a bit of a shame that some people go their whole lives thinking that "gourmet chocolate" refers to those heart-shaped boxes of factory truffles passed around after Valentine's Day, but this couldn't be further from the truth (especially if you get to the box of Valentine's chocolates last and all that's left are the picked-over remains, most of them with holes in the bottom where your blittle sister punched her thumb through to see what kind of chocolate each contained).

True gourmet chocolate is usually crafted by master chocolatiers (which, speaking of, must be an amazing job). These chocolatiers construct chocolates in the same way that professional chefs fabricate meals; with the best ingredients, best recipes, and with an expert sense of taste. Though the finest chocolates can be found only at the table of one of these chocolatiers, other fine retail outlets like Godiva also sell some very good gourmet chocolates. Of course, like the finest meals, these gourmet chocolates do come at a price. Though you may pay \$15 for a box of 50 chocolate truffles in a drug store, you're more likely to pay from \$1.50-\$5.00 per truffle if you're getting them from a professional chocolatiers.

Though gourmet chocolates aren't very likely to replace Hershey's Kisses in your everyday candy dish, they do make a great touch of excess, especially for that special person in your life (and even if you decide to spoil yourself every now and again). It's tough to explain or replicate the flavor of an outstanding chocolate; it's truly something you need to experience for yourself. Though it may take a little searching, eventually you'll find that perfect chocolate, and it will be tough to ever go back to Hershey's Kisses again.

Tyler J Stevenson writes on a variety of subjects, always with valuable news or reviews. See his work at <http://just-chocolate.info> <http://chocolate-just-chocolate.info> or at <http://realgoodsite.info/>

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