

# The Truth About Chocolate & Your Health

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Here in the UK, we adore chocolate. We consume tons of the stuff - literally - and the media keep telling us that "chocolate is healthy"... so naturally, we can chomp away to our heart's desire, right? Well... not so fast! We need to g-e-n-t-l-y put the brakes on before we get totally carried away! Chocolate is indeed healthy, from a nutritional perspective, but we have to be crystal clear about what's healthy and what, most definitely, is not! **So, can chocolate really be a healthy part of our day-to-day lives?**

**The cacao bean** (which is where chocolate begins its delectable journey) does indeed contain many health-giving substances and very powerful antioxidants. **BUT** (and it's a big but), there's a major difference between cacao, 'quality' chocolate, and mass produced, highly processed chocolate bars, that are loaded with refined sugars and hydrogenated fats. These processed sugars, and worse... when eaten with processed fats like this, are major dietary culprits in obesity and most lifestyle disease of today.

**The healthiest form of chocolate, by far, is raw cacao.** Raw cacao seeds from the cacao tree are the pure unadulterated form of chocolate as we know it, and cacao 'paste' makes a healthy 'raw' form of chocolate, which is fast becoming the 'queen bee' of the chocolate world. Raw chocolate companies are springing up everywhere, all over the world, selling their versions of 'raw chocolate bars'.

**Raw cacao is packed with nutrition.** One of the most nutritionally complex foods in the world, it is particular rich in many essential minerals and antioxidants. Antioxidants such as flavonols are a large group of natural plant-based chemicals essential to the health and function of every living cell. Infact cacao is known to have one of the highest levels of antioxidants of almost any other food on the planet. It has around 10 times more antioxidants than blueberries and 20 times more than red wine! Cacao's high content of the minerals magnesium, manganese, iron and sulphur is also definitely worth highlighting.



**Sulphur** is often been dubbed “the beauty mineral”, due to its crucial role in skin, hair and nail health. It is also vital for joint and liver health.

**Magnesium** is needed for over 300 enzymes in the body, and so crucial to health on many levels - particularly to the health of the bones, to balanced brain chemistry, hormones and mood, and also for cardiovascular health. Cacao is loaded with magnesium, so a little raw chocolate with some pumpkins seeds for example, would be an ideal snack to lift the mood, balance hormones, and provide many key nutrients!

Raw cacao is often touted for its **PEA** content. PEA or **phenylethylamine** is a chemical produced in the brain, and actually rises when we are in love! So it might not just be coincidence that we crave chocolate on an emotional level! PEA can make us feel more alert too, as it increases the flow of messages between nerve cells. However, there is some contention and debate as to how much PEA in chocolate actually reaches the brain. BUT... remember that the placebo effect is a very powerful 'chemical', so if you believe it will lift your spirits, or maybe even help you fall in love... then who am I to say it won't!

**Cacao nibs** are widely available now, and probably the cheapest way to benefit from raw chocolate. They have absolutely no added sugars, milk or other ingredients. Nibs are the raw pieces of the chocolate nut, but do ensure you buy them in the 'raw' form, and not roasted. Cacao nibs are best thoroughly ground in a coffee grinder and then used to make your very own chocolate 'energy' bars, or desserts, or simply added to morning smoothies. You can also buy **ready-ground raw cacao powder**, which is probably best for desserts and smoothies. You can use raw nibs to enrich healthy homemade trail mixes, with added juicy raisins, or dried blueberries and cranberries, chopped dates, figs or apricots, and raw nuts and seeds.

David Wolfe, co-author of Naked Chocolate, says, “Cacao beans are probably the best kept secret in the entire history of food.” So next time you have a little chocolate craving, or need a fast mood booster, why not reach for some raw chocolate. Quite frankly, **this is the real 'health food'**.

Raw chocolate, and raw chocolate products, definitely have a more intense chocolate flavour. My favourite raw chocolate here in the UK is from **Pure Flavour**, but you'll also find other brands around, such as **Naked, Raw Living** and **Xocai**.

**Pure Flavour** first introduced me to raw chocolate when I visited a local food festival a couple of years back and met the company's owner Emma Slinn. I have been hooked ever since! They produce high quality and handmade raw chocolate bars - using organic ingredients such as raw cacao butter, raw cacao powder, wild raw mesquite powder, raw agave nectar, organic raisins, & organic hazelnuts. Their 50g mini fruit and nut chocolate bar is a favourite! Because products such as these do not have excess added sugars, there are no 'sugar rushes' to deal



with. In fact raw cacao (which doesn't naturally contain any sugar) has little, if no effect on blood sugar levels. You also 'need' to eat far less, as it's so rich and intense. You can check out the selection of raw chocolate treats at [www.PureFlavour.co.uk](http://www.PureFlavour.co.uk) (search 'raw chocolate' once there). I can attest, their chocolate is truly delicious!

Let's talk a little about 'quality' chocolate, which gives you some of the health-benefits of the cacao, and little 'excess' sugar and fat, present in so many everyday 'conventional' chocolate bars. Choose bars that are **at least 70-80%** cocoa, and fairtrade too if possible. Well-known brands include Dagoba chocolate bars, Green and Black's and Bendick's. Personally, I love individual handmade chocolates from chocolate shops, or independent producers. There is something very special about indulging in a beautifully crafted handmade chocolate, from a taste, texture and an artistic point of view.

#### **An important side-note...**

The amount of chocolate needed to produce the reported health benefits that the media so often talk about, is around 100g eaten on a near daily basis! That's about 5-600 calories worth, so nearly a third of a woman's recommended daily calorie intake, and for men, about a quarter. So, please be aware that eating chocolate (raw or otherwise) is not the one and only 'elixir' to wonderful health! Yes, it can be enjoyed, and indeed LOVED, when eaten in balance and moderation with many other healthy, nutrient rich foods in the diet! I am sorry if this brings you back down to earth with a jolt, but hopefully, the following quotes - and **3 deliciously indulgent recipes** - will soon bring that chocolatey smile back again!

## Chocolate Wisdom

“Forget love, I'd rather fall in chocolate”

*Anon*

“Nine out of ten people like chocolate. The tenth person always lies.”

*American cartoonist, John Q*

“You can deprive the body, but the soul needs chocolate.”

*Dagoba Mantra*

“It's not that chocolates are a substitute for love.

Love is a substitute for chocolate.”

*Miranda Ingram*

“If you are not feeling well, if you have not slept, chocolate will revive you.

But you have no chocolate... my dear, how will you ever manage?”

*Marquise de Sevigne, 1677*

“Giving chocolate to others is an intimate form of communication,  
a sharing of deep, dark secrets.”

*Milton Zelman*

## Chocolate, lime & pumpkin seed energy bars with sesame seeds & raisins

*Delicious homemade natural raw energy bars, rich in protein, minerals and essential fats - this new recipe of mine combines raw chocolate (cacao), organic seeds, agave syrup and organic raisins, and the natural flavours of fresh lime zest and juice. These bars are perfect for any time of the day, eaten as a "fast" breakfast bar, or energy boosting snack. They are also ideal to eat as a pre or post workout snack and they'll also work very well during long endurance events or training sessions, lasting 90 mins plus. These bars are particularly high potassium and zinc.*

*Makes 3 bars*

35g organic cacao nibs

50g organic pumpkin seeds

30g organic sesame seeds

40g organic raisins

4 tsp agave syrup (16g)

Zest of ½ lime

Fresh lime juice to bind

Grind the pumpkin seeds, cacao nibs and sesame seeds in a coffee grinder or other grinding device. Place the "flour" in a bowl and add the raisins and agave syrup. Blend well with a wooden spoon, to begin to form a dough. Grate the zest of ½ a fresh lime and add to the mix. Finally add enough fresh lime juice to form a not-too-sticky dough. Be careful not to add too much.

With your hands form one large "dough ball". Cut the ball into 3 portions, and roll with your hands into sausage-like shapes. Wrap each piece in kitchen paper (this will make it slightly less sticky), and refrigerate overnight, or until firm. You can slice into bite-size chunks if desired (perfect for long runs, bike rides or endurance racing). The dough can also be cut into shapes with pastry cutters, to make cookies.

## Organic chocolate-coated figs

6-7 organic dried figs

50g of organic high-cocoa chocolate (70-75% cocoa)

¼ tsp of cinnamon or ¼ tsp of nutmeg

Melt the chocolate in a pan, over a low heat. Add the cinnamon and stir. Taking one fig at a time, coat one side with the warm chocolate, turn and coat the other. Place on a plate. Without licking



your fingers 😊, coat all the figs in the same way, placing them one by one on the plate. Finally, put the plate of coated figs in the fridge for at least one hour for the chocolate to set. You may now lick your fingers - and the pan if you so desire!

These could be served simply with a cup of peppermint, fennel or rose tea, or an espresso. For a very decadent but delicious light supper dessert, you could serve chocolate figs, very happily with some creamy goats cheese, and oatcakes or watercress, or as a dessert, serve 2 figs per person, with a dollop of your favourite cold natural yogurt, or crème fraiche.

## Avocado Chocolate Mousse with Strawberries

*This is a super alternative to conventional chocolate mousse. Avocados can be used in many dessert dishes, and smoothies too, to replace high fat dairy foods such as cream and butter. This dessert is dairy-free, full of healthy monounsaturated fat, and generally an excellent choice for a decadent moment!*

Serves 4

3 very ripe avocados

50g raw cacao powder

50ml water

100ml maple syrup

Seeds scraped from 1 vanilla pod

225g punnet strawberries, thinly sliced

Place all the mousse ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth, scraping the sides down a few times during blending. Then simply spoon the mousse into dessert bowls and top with strawberries.

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We hope you found the information and recipes in this free mini-ebook useful and are inspired to try out the recipes. You might also like to download another free mini-book from Simply Nutrition:

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