

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES NEWSLETTER

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Chocolate's Treat, or Trick?

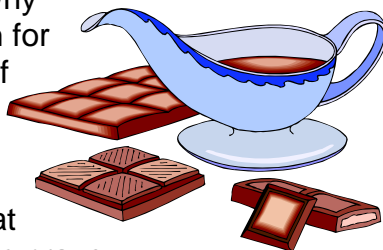
Mary Keith, PhD, LD/N, Foods, Nutrition and Health Agent

Chocolate can lower your blood pressure, right? If you haven't seen an ad claiming health benefits, and chocolate bars announcing their pure chocolate content recently, you are a rare bird! If you read the fine print, you might get a few extra details, such as: But only dark chocolate! At least 60% cacao! With nibs included! How much is true and how much is hype?



Blood Pressure

There's a reason why some people reach for a box, bag or bar of chocolate when they are stressed. The comics would have us believe that it's only women who crave chocolate, but men do too. And they have a good, physical reason for doing so. It is true: research shows that there are ingredients in chocolate that can relax artery walls. Relaxing the arteries lets them expand and



that reduces the pressure. Wonderful! So let's eat lots of chocolate to get more of those polyphenols and flavonols, those phytonutrient, antioxidant things.

Processing for More Flavor

It would be nice if it were as simple as eating more chocolate. Unfortunately, it's much more complicated. Pure cacao beans, the raw ingredient for chocolate, are unbearably bitter. If you ever tried to eat a spoonful of cocoa powder or nibble on a bar of



baking chocolate you've experienced the pucker power of plain chocolate. A doctor who was part of one of the studies said that eating the chocolate used in the tests was worse than taking medicine!

But even that cocoa or baking chocolate has been partially processed. Plain raw cocoa beans are even more astringent and bitter. Plus, they don't even taste like what we call chocolate. To make them taste like the chocolate we know the beans are first fermented, then roasted, and then ground.

Fermentation develops some of the flavor and color. Roasting develops more of it. Now they are beginning to taste chocolate-y. Then they are ground into a thick liquid paste.



The beans have enough fat, the *cocoa butter*, in them that the ground beans are almost like molasses. Although this molasses-like paste of

ground beans has no alcohol it is called cocoa liquor. But it is chocolate-y, but still doesn't have a good chocolate flavor.

To make this cocoa liquor taste like 'real' chocolate it has to be sloshed back and forth in huge tanks for several days. It's the combination of heating mixed with air that really develops the flavor and texture of chocolate.

Processing Decreases Benefits



Unfortunately, all that heat and air also destroy a lot of the polyphenols and flavonols! So plain baking chocolate has much less active ingredient than cocoa beans. And if you've ever taken a nibble of

baking chocolate or even cocoa powder, you know that it's still super-bitter.

Adding sugar and milk improves the flavor immensely, but dilutes the active ingredients that are left. If you also add any nuts, krispies, caramel or other delicious ingredients, you have diluted them further.

You have increased the calorie and fat count too.

White chocolate is made with cocoa butter, the fat, plus added milk and sugar. Since

there are no active ingredients there is no health benefit, only extra calories to burn off.

How much do you need?

There's no way to know how much of any candy bar, or even of bitter baking chocolate, you would have to eat to get the same results that research finds. Most of the studies use purified extracts of active ingredients, not edible candy or even baking chocolate.

Differences in processing give a Milky Way a different flavor from a KitKat bar. They let a can of Hershey's cocoa have a different flavor from a can of Nestle's. They also mean that every different chocolate on the shelf probably has a different amount of active ingredients.



Dark chocolate, since it has less milk and sugar added, probably has more beneficial phytonutrients left. But while the candy bar advertising is interesting, there's no way to prove at this point that a 60% chocolate bar is more, or less beneficial than a 70% bar.

So if you're going to eat chocolate, don't expect miracles. A little, in moderation, can be a treat or part of a healthy diet. Dark chocolate is better than milk chocolate. But is the difference significant? No one knows yet. And the doctors are not prescribing chocolate pills instead of blood pressure meds. Treat yourself to a nibble now and then if you want, but don't forget the other recommendations for heart healthy living.

Harvesting Health

Written by Jessica Brennan, EFNEP Extension Agent
with contributions from Program Assistants Elizabeth North and Mary Owens



Even if Mother Nature didn't get the memo, the fall season is here. Baseball playoffs are beginning, children are getting their Halloween

costumes ready and soon holiday decorations will fill the stores two months early. Among these signs, there are certain foods that come to mind when you think of fall and the holiday season. One of these is pumpkin.

Pumpkin is low in saturated fat and very low in cholesterol and sodium. Additionally, it is a very good source of seven vitamins and minerals, and a good source of eight more. In fact, one cup of cooked pumpkin provides almost 20 percent of the Vitamin C needed in one day and more than twice the daily value of Vitamin A. But what else can be done except carve it and make it into a pie? The following are some pumpkin ideas that will benefit your health as well as your taste buds.

Grilled Pumpkin

2 pounds fresh pumpkin
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon oregano
dash salt & black pepper



Wash pumpkin, clean out seeds and fibers. Peel and cut into one inch cubes. Mix pumpkin cubes and all ingredients. Grill each side on medium heat for 5-10 minutes. Pumpkin is done when it is easily pierced by a fork. Serve with beef, poultry or pork. Makes 6-8 servings.

Next is a quick and healthy alternative to the sugary sweets that are traditionally brought for children's school holiday parties.

Spicy Pumpkin Cookies

1 box yellow cake mix
2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice
1 cup canned pumpkin
¼ cup vegetable oil
½ cup raisins or pecans (optional)



Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Lightly spray cookie sheet with nonstick spray. Combine cake mix, pumpkin pie spice, pumpkin and oil and beat with electric mixer on low speed for one minute. Stir in raisins or pecans. Drop spoonfuls onto cookie sheet two inches apart. Bake for 11 to 14 minutes or until light golden brown color around edges. Remove and cool. Makes about 30 cookies.

Even those leftover pumpkin seeds make a healthy snack. Roasted and unsalted, they are very low in cholesterol and sodium and a good source of protein, magnesium and zinc. Warning: pumpkin seeds are high in calories, so when you do eat them, consume small amounts. A sprinkle over your salad or a handful to snack on is all you need to benefit from their nutrients.

Roasted Pumpkin Seeds

Scoop seeds from pumpkin and separate from pulp. Wash in warm water, then spread onto a cookie sheet. Sprinkle with seasoning (optional). Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes, stirring every 5 minutes to ensure even cooking. Remove a sample and cool to taste. If insides are dry, they are done cooking. Cool seeds and serve. Suggested seasonings include cheesy popcorn, taco or Cajun seasoning, garlic salt or salt substitute.

For more information about the pumpkin, visit www.pumpkinnook.co

The Key to Debt Relief

By Lisa Leslie, Hillsborough County Extension Agent

We are bombarded with messages to buy more, newer, better, and bigger products – automobiles, cars, homes televisions, computers, clothes, etc. – so it is not surprising that many people find themselves in debt.

Ironically, once in debt, people are then bombarded with offers that suggest there is a



quick and easy solution to get out of debt. But the truth is that there are no quick and easy solutions. Offers that sound too good to be true are likely to be scams that can lead to worse financial situations.

The first step towards freeing yourself from debt is to take a reality check and analyze your situation. You will want to look at your budget and take a look at how much difference there is between income and expenses. Can you reduce unnecessary expenses? Increase your income?

Be careful if you decide to look for increased income through a consolidation loan or home refinance. High levels of debt often have a negative impact on your credit score so the cost of a consolidation loan can be expensive. Advertisements that say credit scores won't affect your eligibility for a loan are neglecting to mention that a low credit score does impact the cost of the loan.

Refinancing a home can be especially risky and might not be helpful. Continually refinancing your home is not the path to financial freedom. In all cases, avoid dealing questionable offers you receive by telephone, email or postal mail.

Power Pay Debts Away

Utah State University Extension offers a free, non-commercial and confidential debt analysis calculator at their web site www.powerpay.org. All you need to do to access the calculator is to provide an email address. The email address is used to send you a password. The University does not share your email or use it for any marketing purposes.

What is a Power Payment?

As soon as one debt is paid off, applying the monthly payment from that debt to the next debt is called a Power Payment. Power Pay can help you map out a month-by-month plan to payoff what you owe faster without paying any more than you are currently paying monthly toward debt repayment. The calculator will also help you evaluate the effect of paying more than the minimum payments or making extra "lump sum" payments.



Take Action Today

Contact your creditors if you have past due bills or you are unable to make the minimum payment. Try to work out a modified payment plan that is realistic for your budget. Contact your creditor as soon as possible. If you delay and the account is sold to a collection agency you will lose the opportunity to deal with the creditor.

Debt relief takes time and commitment. The surest way to financial success is to face your situation and take action. For more information visit:

<http://tampabaysaves.ifas.ufl.edu>.

Dealing with Morning Madness

Diana Converse, Family Life Educator

Have you ever found yourself frantically searching for your child's lost shoe five minutes before the bus is to come? Or sent your child off to school without lunch money? Does your child forget to take his or her homework or special projects to school? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may be experiencing a common family problem called "morning madness."

The rush to get everyone off to school and work is a challenge to many families. However, your children will do much better in school if they experience peaceful, enjoyable mornings with their families. Here are a few tips to help you manage morning madness:



Set Your Clocks Ahead

Do you and your children always seem to arrive late everywhere you go? It may be all psychological, but having your clocks and watches set five to ten minutes ahead can keep you on schedule. You may even choose not to let the rest of the family know that you've changed the clocks a few minutes.

Lay Out Clothing for Everyone the Night before – Including Shoes and Sox

This puts an end to those last minute searches for a missing shoe. Teach your older children to get their clothes ready the night before school. Sometimes picking out two outfits at night makes the morning decision easier. Remember to get your clothes organized for the next day, too.

Have a Cubby for Your Children to Keep Items They Need To Take To School

Keep a box or basket near the door for children to keep their books, lunch money, homework, notes to teachers, school projects and anything else that they need to take to school. Teach your children to check this area before heading out the door each morning.

Start Going to Bed Earlier

It may take your body a few weeks to get used to going to bed an hour or so earlier, but in the long run, you will find it easier to get up in the morning. Ease into the change slowly so your body can adjust more easily by going to bed 10 minutes early the first week, 20 minutes the second week, etc.

Get Up Earlier

Setting your alarm clock 15 minutes earlier than usual will go a long way in easing morning madness. For employed parents, plan to get up 1½ hours prior to the time you must leave for work. This extra time will allow you to arrive at work relaxed and prepared to face the day. It will also give you a few minutes of quiet time in the morning before the rest of the household gets out of bed. Relax with a cup of coffee or tea and catch up on the morning news.

Take Time for Breakfast

If your child takes a lunch to school, pack it at the same time you are preparing breakfast (or make it while preparing dinner the night before). Teach older child how to be self-sufficient and to pack their own lunch.



They are more likely to eat what they have packed

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