



Let Chocolate Be Your Medicine

There has been a considerable amount of attention in the media recently about the fact that chocolate, particularly dark chocolate, is actually **good** for you. As with everything else we hear in the media, we took this information with a grain of salt. As devout chocolate lovers, this was good news, but as inherent sceptics, we wondered "how **good** is good?" We began to research the subject with very enlightening and thankfully pleasant, results.

Decadent, heavenly, sinful, rich, dark, or sweet. Whatever words are used to describe it, chocolate has evoked a range of emotions from guilt to pleasure for centuries. And for those of us who are chocolate devotees, we would swear that it even makes us **feel** better when we eat it... and maybe it does!

We still have much to learn from our ances-



tors - or perhaps we have lost sight of the knowledge they gathered for our benefit over many centuries. Medicinal uses of cacao originated among the Olmec, Maya and Aztec civilizations; however, there is evidence of cacao used for medicinal purposes from pre-14th century in the Americas, with introductions into European culture in the mid 1500s. Cacao was used to treat many ailments, including weight problems (yes, weight problems!), to stimulate the nervous systems of weak or exhausted patients, and to improve digestions and elimination. It has also been used to treat the loss of appetite (including sexual appetite), mental fatigue, anaemia, and kidney stones (1). Cacao powder and extracts have also been found to prohibit the growth of cancer cells in the human colon (2).

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How Happy Are You?

It's the subject of scores of clichés and movies, and now research has proven that your attitude towards life can actually have a profound impact on your health and longevity. A 2008 Japanese study of 43,391 men and women found that people who live without a specific joy in life or were 50 percent more likely to die during follow-up compared with those who had a sense that life was worth living. The first group also had a 60 percent greater risk of death from cardiovascular disease, most commonly stroke.

Other studies have confirmed this finding. A 1995 Nova Scotia Health Study of 1,791 men and women (2) found that those with a positive attitude towards life had a reduced risk of heart disease for 10 years longer than those who didn't. Research has also indicated that people who are depressed, but otherwise healthy, are more likely to develop coronary heart disease, irrespective of what other risk factors they might have.

The Japanese call the joy of life "ikigai" and define it as 'something important to live for'. Ikigai is more than this, however (1). It reflects

an attitude towards the future – a reason to get up in the morning. From a health perspective, as long as an attitude of optimism is the norm on most days, it will see us through the bad days.

Information gathered from Blue Zones, regions around the world with a high percentage of healthy people living beyond the age of 100 years, found that ikigai for people living in these areas was the simple things - the food they enjoyed preparing, the time shared with friends and family, and the normal activities of the day (3).

Consider this when you get up in morning: do the events planned for your day give you joy, or are you living and working for reasons other than pleasure (money, status, or because you feel you don't have other options)? Today, intend to have a day filled with joy. Design your activities around what gives you pleasure. Savour each bite of your food, listen to your favourite music on your way to work, and plan at least one relaxing after-work activity for yourself or with someone you enjoy being with.

Enjoy your love of food ...with food that loves you back

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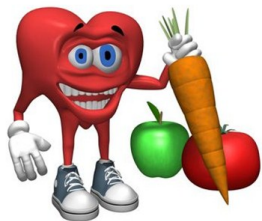


Trying new grains can add variety to the diet, more information inside



Heart Friendly Fiber

Dietary fiber is well known for promoting intestinal health, but can fiber play a role in prevention of cardiovascular disease as well? Numerous research studies affirm a resounding "yes"! One such study suggested that even a modest 6 gram daily increase in fiber was associated with a 25 percent reduction in ischemic heart disease mortality (reduced blood supply to the heart)(1). The main mechanism behind fiber's role in the prevention of heart disease is its ability to lower cholesterol. Soluble fiber, in particular, binds to LDL cholesterol (the "bad" cholesterol) in the small intestine, preventing it from entering the bloodstream. That isn't the only effect, however. Foods rich in fiber have low Glycemic Index scores and come naturally packaged with numerous micronutrients (2),



including potent antioxidants. Also, fiber has been shown to be an effective weight management tool (3-7). Substantial evidence indicates that a diet in which whole grains are the main carbohydrate source, along with an abundance of fruits and vegetables and adequate omega-3 fatty acids offers significant protection against cardiovascular disease (1). In fact, several studies conducted over the past fifteen years have found that cereal fibers lowered the risk of cardiovascular disease better than fruit or vegetable fibers (2-5). Since cereal grains pose the greatest heart protection, let's take a closer look at some extraordinary but uncommon ancient grains. All of the grains listed below are suitable for gluten free diets.

There are many delicious new grains coming on the market. Most of us are familiar with whole wheat, brown rice, oats, barley and rye. Also becoming popular are ancient grains kamut and spelt and gluten-free options such as quinoa and amaranth. New grains are entering the market all the time and here are three, all gluten-free, that you may like to try. All of these plus many other grains are available at your local health food store and the natural food section in your grocery store. Should your local store not have the one you are looking for there are online sites to serve you wherever you live. See page 4 for a list.

Fonio: Fonio, the smallest form of millet, has an ancient history dating back to the 14th century. A staple food in various parts of West Africa where it is also known as 'acha' or 'fundu', it is also considered a gourmet item. In Togo, a form of ice cream made from fonio mixed with milk and honey is a big hit amongst the locals! One of the most nutritious grains, fonio stands apart from other grains in terms of its essential amino acid content. It's a rich source of methionine and cystine, amino ac-



ids often lacking in other grains and cereals. It also boasts a high calcium and iron content and is high in fiber, providing 7.4 grams per 100 gram serving. Fonio can be used as a substitute for couscous. It can also be made into porridge or mixed with other types of flour to make bread or other baked goods. Cook fonio by steaming or boiling it for approximately 20 minutes. Look for fonio at African-Caribbean markets, specialty stores, or on line.

Tef or Teff: Tef originated in northern Ethiopia, where it is still widely cultivated and used to prepare 'injera', a thin, flat, pancake-like bread, made from dough fermented for 2-3 days and served with various sauces. Tef flour is also used to make porridge and local alcoholic beverages. In the Western world, tef has made its way into the health food market and is considered a gourmet food. Tef flour is used as a thickening agent in



a range of products, including soups, stews, gravies and puddings. Cooked tef has a robust, nutty flavor. Due to its small size, the whole grain is almost always ground into flour and has a high nutrient content. Tef is relatively rich in fiber, providing 3 grams per 100 gram serving. It is also a good source of minerals, particularly calcium and iron. Add tef flour to cookies, muffins, cakes, pancakes and waffles.

Sesame Fonio (14)

Ingredients: 2 teaspoons peanut oil, 1/2 cup black sesame seeds, 3 cups water, Pinch salt, 1 cup fonio

Preparation: 1. Heat the oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add sesame seeds; stir and cook until fragrant. 2. Meanwhile, in a saucepan, bring the water and salt to a boil. Add fonio and sautéed sesame seeds. Return to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for about 7 more minutes until all water is absorbed. Stir to fluff. Can be eaten as a side dish with fish or chicken.

Fat Soluble vs. Water Soluble

Research is now distinguishing fat soluble phyto-nutrients as more heat stable than water soluble. Free plant sterols were heated to increase bioavailability and added to fried tortilla chips which were consumed by subjects for four weeks. Results showed significant decrease in serum cholesterol and LDL levels with no effect on HDL levels.

Tiger Nut Drink Recipe

Ingredients: 1 L of water, 1 mango, 2 tbsps of tiger nut flour, 2 tbsps almond meal

Preparation: Blend all ingredients in a blender. Let sit for 2 mins., then blend again. Enjoy a revitalizing drink! Mix tiger nut flour into muesli, freshly made fruit or vegetable juices, soups, yogurt or raw food.



Dark Chocolate Pudding (Serves 6)



Butter or coconut oil, room temperature, for baking dish

2/3 cup coconut sweetener or sucanat plus more for baking dish

6 large eggs, room temperature, separated
6 ounces 70 % or higher cocoa solid chocolate, melted in a double boiler

1/2 tsp sea salt

1/2 tsp vanilla

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a shallow 2-quart baking dish or six individual ramekins, coat with coconut sweetener or sucanat, tapping out excess. Melt chocolate in a double boiler. In a large bowl, whisk egg yolks with granulated sugar until lightened in color. Whisk in melted chocolate; set aside.

In a large, clean bowl, using an electric mixer on high, beat egg whites with salt until soft peaks form. Whisk 1/3 of whites into chocolate mixture. Add remaining whites, and gently fold with a rubber spatula just until combined (do not over mix). Transfer batter to prepared baking dish. Set dish in a roasting pan, and pour enough boiling water into pan to come about 1 inch up side of dish. Bake until puffed and just set (center of cake should barely move when jiggled), 25 to 35 minutes. Let cool 5 minutes; dust with confectioners' sugar just before serving.

Raw Vegan Chocolate Cinnamon Mousse

4 ripe organic avocados, peeled

1 cup raw cocoa nibs

3/4 to 1 cup coconut sweetener or raw agave nectar

1/4 cup coconut butter*

1 tsp ground vanilla pod

1/2 tsp ground cinnamon

Pinch sea salt

*Any nut butter can be used



Grind the cocoa nibs in a clean coffee grinder. Place all the ingredients in a high-speed blender and puree until smooth. If the mixture is too thick add a little water to get the blender going. Scrape the sides of the blender and mix until smooth and thick.

Spoon into glasses and chill for a couple of hours before serving. Can also be used in an ice cream machine to make a delicious frozen treat.

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Before running to your local variety store to purchase a jumbo pack of your favourite chocolate bars, keep in mind that all cacao products are not created equal. Most readily available cacao products have undergone significant processing including fermentation, Broma processing, or Dutch processing, and have been diluted and processed with ingredients that may not be quite as benign as a dried cacao bean.

Prior to processing, pure cacao is among the most concentrated source of antioxidants. It has one of the highest ORAC (Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity) scores of all foods, higher than berries and red wine. Cacao processing can cause antioxidant deterioration, however. Research suggests that drying cacao beans has a minimal effect on the antioxidant value, and while the results of

roasting are rather unclear, it seems that roasting cacao beans at temperatures exceeding 70 degrees Celsius results in a very significant loss of antioxidant activity (specifically epicatechin), whereas roasting at 120 degrees Celsius causes a very significant increase (over 600%) in antioxidant activity (3). **Natural, non-alkalized** cacao powders have the highest ORAC score.

Dutch processing, which originated in the early 1800s, is the most damaging to the antioxidants in cacao. The process involves the addition of alkali to chocolate, which can result in losses of up to 90 percent of the antioxidant properties. Dutch processing gives chocolate a mild and smooth taste and texture which many consider to be pleasing to the palate, and a lighter colour than naturally processed chocolate, which possesses a more bitter quality that is more of an acquired taste for some.

Another Reason To Love Chocolate

Cocoa butter is another healthy element found in chocolate. As a naturally saturated fat, it contains significant amounts of beneficial fatty acids such as antibacterial lauric acid and anti-fungal caprylic acid. It also contains a significant amount of oleic acid, the health fatty acid also found in olive oil that helps raise HDL levels. More importantly, cocoa butter contains plant sterols, beta sitosterol, stigmasterol and campesterol, now being added to margarines and other polyunsaturated fats to help prevent rancidity. Studies have found plant sterols have anti-inflammatory properties and help lower cholesterol levels and may help prevent cancer and heart disease. Many studies referring to the benefits of dark chocolate frequently mention the plant sterols as one of the benefits. It is important to know that these benefits are due to the fat content and not the "dark" content which is a factor of the flavonoids, also quite beneficial.

Reduce Your Risk Of Heart Disease

The circulatory system is always working. The heart cannot stop pumping, the blood cannot stop flowing. Because we rely so completely on our circulatory system, we must do our best to care for it. You can reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease by increasing your intake of dietary fiber. Aim for 25 to 35 grams per day, but introduce fiber-rich foods slowly and increase water accordingly. Increasing fiber, getting regular physical activity, not smoking, and maintaining a healthy body weight could very well prevent the majority of cardiovascular disease in Western populations. Make these changes in your daily routine, and you've got a powerful dose of heart disease prevention!



Heart Friendly Fiber

Tiger nut (Chufa, *Cyperus esculentus*): The Tigernut, or 'Chufa' as it is known in Spanish, is not a nut, but rather a small tuber. Ranking amongst the oldest cultivated plants in ancient Egypt, tigernuts are now found extensively in California and are cultivated in Spain. The chewy tubers have a slightly sweet, nutty flavour. They are quite hard and are typically soaked in water before they can be eaten to soften and improve their texture. Tigernuts can be eaten raw, roasted, dried, baked or made into a beverage called



'horchata', or tigernut milk, a popular drink in Spain. They are also used to flavour ice cream and biscuits. Tigernuts have excellent nutritional properties, most notably a heart-healthy fat composition similar to that of olive oil, as well as a rich mineral content, including calcium, phosphorus, iron and potassium. They contain most of the amino acids, seventeen, in fact, and have a high vitamin E content. A recently published study determined that tigernut flour could be used to supplement cereal flour to improve its nutritional content.

Fat Is Not A Four Letter Word

The word 'fat' causes many to flinch despite its importance in the maintenance of a healthy body. Stern warnings continue to abound, cautioning us to reduce or avoid dietary saturated fats such as those found in cheese and red meat. Do claims that these foods raise cholesterol levels leading to heart disease stem from solid research, or are they fuelled by misinformation?

Fats fall under two main categories: saturated and unsaturated. The chemical composition of saturated fats (fats that are solid at room temperature, including animal fats) does not contain double bonds, whereas unsaturated fats (primarily vegetable oils that are liquid at room temperature) contain at least two carbon atoms sharing a double bond, creating a less stable and more volatile fat. Saturated fats are, in fact, more stable than unsaturated fats, and can withstand exposure to higher temperatures than unsaturated (liquid) fats (1).

The term fatty acid, for example omega-3 fatty acid, denotes a chain of carbons and hydrogen atoms with an acid group attached at the end. The length of the carbon chain and the number of double bonds along the chain determine the type of fatty acid (1).

Fatty acid carbon chains are further categorized as short (having only 4-6 carbons in their chain), medium (8-12 carbons) and long (12 or more carbons) chain fatty acids. Short and medium chain fatty acids absorb directly into the blood and are quickly transported to the liver (1). Some food sources of medium chain fatty acids include butter and coconut oil.

So the question persists: does saturated fat increase the risk of heart disease? A 2009 me-

ta-analysis of 21 studies showed that there is no significant evidence for concluding that dietary saturated fat is associated with an increased risk of CHD or CVD. Other studies are linking the Western diet of highly refined carbohydrates and low consumption of fruits and vegetables as the mitigating factor for the high rates of CVD.

More recent information finds that interleukin-6 and C-Reactive protein (indicators of inflammation in the body) was a better predictor of mortality than the conventional risk factors for CHD, such as obesity and high cholesterol (5). Furthermore, a study on the protective effects of saturated fats in mice found an interesting result - wild mice responded much more strongly to the protective effects than lab mice, suggesting that the immune system responds to the type of fat consumed (7).

Another study showed that obese individuals eating a diet of MCT (medium chain triglycerides) as opposed to LCT (long chain triglycerides) significantly reduced their body weight and fat (8). In terms of general weight loss, MCT oil was shown to improve weight loss over the use of LCT oil (olive oil) (9). The research shows a difference in the effect the oils have on the body depending on the type of saturated fat consumed.

Holistic nutrition philosophy suggests that the whole person, not just the disease, must be treated. Practitioners do not encourage one type of food group over another, but rather build their recommendations based on the state of the whole person - their immune system, overall diet, stress levels, attitude, sleep patterns and more. More importantly, they should stress the enjoyment of all whole foods from all food groups.

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