

Dark Chocolate May Be Good for Your Child's Asthma and Offers Other Health Benefits

Kids love chocolate - sometimes a little *too* much. Any parent taking their child to the dentist after a Halloween candy binge can attest to this. Children with asthma love chocolate as much as other kids, but can they eat candy bars and Hershey kisses without disturbing the delicate airways to their lungs? Chocolate rarely causes asthma attacks, so it's safe for most kids. Small quantities of plain dark chocolate may actually provide health benefits, and it's not as sweet as milk chocolate or white chocolate.

Dark Chocolate Has Nutritional Value

Dark chocolate contains more anti-oxidants than Acai berries and blueberries, according to a study reported by the Chemistry Central Journal. High-quality dark chocolate brands are packed with iron, magnesium, fiber and copper, so even an after-school candy bar will provide a substantial amount of daily recommended nutrients. Dark chocolate and cocoa contain monounsaturated and saturated fats, making these treats much healthier than chips, fries or other snack foods kids love. Still, dark chocolate is full of calories and sugar and should be consumed in moderation.

The Theobromine in Chocolate Relaxes Bronchial Passageways

Theobromine, an alkaloid substance present in cacao plants, is found in processed chocolate. A study conducted by the Children's Hospital in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada indicated that theobromine does help dilate the bronchi to a small extent in children with asthma. While the amount of theobromine in chocolate consumed by children during an average day won't prevent asthma attacks, it certainly won't harm the airways that lead into the lungs and may even soothe bronchial passageways. The theobromine in chocolate also acts as a cough suppressant, working almost as well as codeine. Eating dark chocolate can have a positive effect on your child's respiratory system, as long it's consumed in moderation.

Chocolate, Blood Pressure and Heart Health

Chocolate has been proven to lower blood pressure and improve heart health in adults. A recent study on conducted by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute in Melbourne, Australia found little difference in young participants' blood pressure before and after eating dark chocolate, but children didn't gain much weight during the course of the study. As long as you monitor the amount of chocolate your child eats-and feed them dark chocolate instead of white or milk chocolate- they shouldn't gain a significant amount of weight or experience any change in their blood pressure or heart health.

Other Health Benefits of Dark Chocolate

Aside from the usual concerns about weight gain, tooth decay (and acne breakouts in teens), dark chocolate contributes to a child's overall health in many ways. The anti-oxidants in chocolate improve brain function. The flavanols in dark chocolate also help shield skin against redness and burns. If your child likes to play outdoors, dark chocolate can act as a sunscreen aid.

Eating a little bit of dark chocolate now and then is fine for your asthmatic child. Chocolate allergies that lead to asthma are rare, but chocolate containing nuts, milk-based chocolate or bits of fruit in chocolate bars might cause allergic reactions that exacerbate asthma. These additives are more likely to cause wheezing and attacks than the chocolate itself. Check with your pediatrician or asthma specialist before adding dark chocolate, or any food or candy, to your child's diet.

**

Research Links:

<http://authoritynutrition.com/7-health-benefits-dark-chocolate/>

<http://journal.chemistrycentral.com/content/5/1/5>

<http://www.webmd.com/diet/news/20120329/health-benefits-chocolate-becoming-credible>