

# Chocolate

## *Can it ever be healthy?*

It's a firm favourite for many - but can it do you good? Here we unpack whether chocolate can actually ever be a healthy addition to your diet



**C**hocolate, with its alluring aroma and addictive flavour, has firmly established itself as a beloved sweet treat in modern-day diets. In fact, it was believed that the average Brit will consume around 7,560 chocolate bars in their lifetime!

From its ancient origins to its diverse forms today, chocolate continues to captivate taste buds worldwide - but amidst its popularity, questions arise about which types offer the most nutritional benefits and how they fit into a balanced diet. Let's delve into the world of chocolate, exploring its different varieties and nutritional profiles...

### **Where did it come from?**

Chocolate has a history spanning over 5,000 years, originating in Mesoamerica. Originally, the Aztecs consumed it as a bitter beverage named xocolatl, blending cocoa beans

with spices and natural flavourings - but the addition of sugar transformed the drink, making it more palatable and popular.

Another significant development occurred when milk was introduced to the concoction, resulting in a creamier, sweeter flavour. This innovation paved the way for chocolate's transition from a liquid to the solid form that we know and love today!

From here, various forms and flavours emerged, and dark, milk and white chocolate became popular varieties, each distinguished by the amount of cocoa solids used.

### **Finding balance and enjoyment**

While each type of chocolate offers its own unique characteristics and nutritional profile, in today's market, there is no specific answer to which is "healthiest". Opting for quality dark chocolate with higher cocoa content for its greater level of antioxidant properties would be the best way to go when picking between the three - but this doesn't mean there can't be room for other chocolate in your life! Mindful consumption and portion control are key to enjoying chocolate as part of a healthy and sustainable diet... so go ahead, treat yourself!

## Milk Chocolate

Milk chocolate reigns as the go-to choice for chocolate enthusiasts. Typically containing cocoa solids, milk solids, sugar, and cocoa butter, this classic sweet treat delivers a moreish combination of flavours.

While it offers similar nutritional properties to white chocolate, its cocoa content

typically ranges between 20% to 35%, influencing its antioxidant levels. The inclusion of added sugar in most milk chocolate varieties does diminish some of its healthful attributes. However, selecting milk chocolate with a higher cocoa content can partially enhance the nutrient profile of this beloved treat.



## Dark Chocolate

Renowned for its intense cocoa flavour, dark chocolate has grown attention over the years for its potential health benefits. But is it really healthy?

With higher cocoa content and less sugar than white and milk, dark chocolate is widely known for its potential to support heart health, cognitive function and lower blood pressure - what's not to like? The flavonoids that are present in dark chocolate (cocoa) are what gives this treat its rich antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

The fermentation process involved contributes to its deep flavour and enhances its nutritional value. It's important to recognise, though, that this process is frequently shortened due to high levels of demand

on the chocolate production process.

Insufficient fermentation time can negatively impact the overall quality and nutritional content of the chocolate. Telltale signs of inadequate fermentation may be hidden in the ingredients list, like the inclusion of vanilla extract to mask the bitter flavour derived from a lack of fermentation. Whilst the sugar content is lower than other chocolate versions, dark chocolate can typically contain higher fat levels.

Whilst chocolate available on the market at the moment often does not necessarily meet the standards to be titled 'healthy', enjoying dark chocolate in moderation can be a delicious way to satisfy cravings without busting your sugar goals.



## White Chocolate

Often considered the sweetest and creamiest of all chocolates, white chocolate stands out with its silky texture and vanilla-infused flavour. Unlike its darker counterparts, white chocolate contains no cocoa solids, instead deriving its flavour from cocoa butter, sugar, and milk solids. This might make you wonder if it even deserves the 'chocolate' label, given its

lack of actual chocolate!

While it may not have the antioxidants found in dark chocolate, white chocolate still provides a small source of calcium and phosphorus from the milk solids - but due to the higher sugar and saturated fat content, its nutritional properties are outweighed by its sugar and fat content. Because of this, white chocolate is one to have in moderation - an occasional treat!

