

Dive Health: Eat Chocolate Before Diving – Really

By Gretchen M. Ashton Jan 25, 2016

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Eat chocolate before diving — it's not only delicious, it's good for your dive health. Chocolate on the outside soothes the skin; chocolate on the inside soothes the soul and much more. Giving someone chocolate as a romantic gesture is no coincidence; it has long been touted for its aphrodisiac qualities. When ingested in small amounts, chocolate helps energize the body during exercise and assists post-workout replenishment of muscles. Best of all, chocolate has properties that help maintain heart health for divers and reduce the physiological stresses associated with decompression sickness (DCS), aiding in post-dive recovery.

There is still a lot of discussion among researchers about the variables and specifics of how cocoa works positively on cardiovascular health, physical performance, and reducing risks of DCS, but it does. Generally speaking, outcomes point to activation of nitric oxide (NOS) and antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects.

Yes, Eat Chocolate Before Diving

You've got our permission to eat chocolate before diving, but a little bite goes a long way. An average chocolate bar is 40 to 45 grams, or about 1.5 ounces. According to the studies, ingestion of just 30 grams of dark chocolate one hour before diving can prevent something called endothelial dysfunction. Endothelium cells form an inner lining in blood vessels, where the presence of NOS and inflammation factor into the body's ability to process substances going to and from the blood and body tissues. NOS hinders bubble formation. Simply stated, properties in dark chocolate help with off-gassing and prevention of DCS.

Eating chocolate before a workout helps maintain blood-glucose levels, higher insulin levels and reduces oxidative stress, helping divers exercise harder and longer, as well as build more muscle and recover faster. Divers wishing to lose body fat will benefit by eating chocolate after a workout to avoid interfering in fat loss. Dark chocolate or cocoa is the best choice and it is important to consume it within 45 minutes after exercise.

Low-fat or non-fat chocolate milk is recommended as one of the best post-workout recovery drinks. Some exercise enthusiasts crave chocolate milk after running or training at high intensities. Chocolate milk provides carbohydrates, protein and amino acids (the building blocks of protein), restoring tired muscles, providing energy to build muscle, speeding up recovery and preventing delayed-onset muscle soreness. Studies describe benefits from eating three to four ounces of dark chocolate prior to high-intensity exercise and workouts lasting at least 90 minutes. This equates to 1/4 cup of 70 percent dark cocoa powder added to milk, water or non-dairy milk. Reducing the portion of chocolate to 1/8 cup is a reasonable recommendation for less intense and shorter workouts.

Research also shows that chocolate helps prevent cardiovascular illness and high blood pressure, which rank at the top of medical conditions reported by divers. Plant-based nutrition is key to maintenance of health. Along with consuming fresh fruits and vegetables to help reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke, divers can enjoy the fruit of the cocoa plant, which has a beneficial effect on blood pressure, insulin resistance and vascular and platelet function.

Remember to enjoy chocolate in moderation and avoid high fat and sugar varieties — this isn't carte blanche to eat a Hershey Bar each day. Chocolate is categorized based on the amount of cocoa solids it contains; the lower the cocoa percentage, the more milk and sugar has been added and the lower concentration of benefits. Dark chocolate ranges from 35 to 80 percent cocoa solids. Baking chocolate is unsweetened and nearly 100 percent cocoa. Milk chocolate contains 20 percent or less of cocoa solids, and white chocolate is made from just the cocoa butter, vanilla, milk and sugar.



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Gretchen brings her passion for diving and fitness together as the founder of ScubaFit® the only fitness for diving certification which is also approved by both diving and fitness agencies. She is an advanced diver, NBFE and ISSA Elite Personal Trainer, Specialist in Fitness Therapy and Nutrition, an AAU World Champion Hall-of-Fame athlete, and a mentor for Water Women, Inc. She shares her message with divers by visiting dive clubs, presenting at scuba shows, as a radio guest, as the publisher of FitDiver® Magazine, and with FitDiver® mobile apps. She widely published with more than 125 articles for diving publications and blogs. For more information or to contact Gretchen, visit www.scubafit.com.

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