

9 Reasons Some Candy Is Good for You

If you're a candy lover who winces with guilt each time you indulge in your favorite treat, take heart: Candy may actually be good for you. Although dark chocolate candy has the most proven health benefits, other favorites, such as peppermint, have real advantages as well.

So, enjoy your treat—in moderation, of course—and check out the ways candy can improve your health.

1. Heart disease. Rich, dark chocolate is packed with powerful heart-healthy antioxidant flavonoids. A study reported in the *British Medical Journal* found that regularly eating chocolate decreases the risk of heart attack and stroke by 39 percent. Another study found that those who ate a chocolate bar weekly reduced their chances of dying from a stroke by 46 percent.

2. Depression. Chocolate contains both serotonin, a neurotransmitter that acts as an antidepressant, as well as a chemical called phenylethylamine (PEA) that enhances mood.

3. Longevity. A study from the Harvard School of Public Health found that people who ate candy several times a month lived almost a year longer than those who ate no candy at all. Researchers believed the antioxidant phenol, which is also found in red wine, may be responsible for the increased longevity of candy lovers. They also speculated that cacao, from which chocolate is made, can reduce oxidation of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol and can enhance immune function.

4. Diabetes. A 2011 animal study found that a flavonoid in licorice called glabridin reversed learning and memory problems caused by Type 2 diabetes and also improved the memory of non-diabetic animals. In addition, a study conducted

at the U.K.'s University of Hull found that dark chocolate increased levels of HDL, or "good" cholesterol, in Type 2 diabetics.

"Chocolate with a high cocoa content should be included in the diet of individuals with Type 2 diabetes as part of a sensible, balanced approach to diet and lifestyle," says researcher Steve Atkin, professor of diabetes and endocrinology. "This study demonstrates that it can offer a potential reduction in cardiovascular risk without detrimental risks on weight, insulin resistance or glycemic control."

5. Stress. Chewing gum can be a sweet way to reduce stress. Studies indicate that the repetitive action of chewing gum stimulates areas of the mind that increase attention and self-control while lowering areas related to stress. Chewing gum also increases serotonin levels.

6. Concentration. Studies at the University of Cincinnati found that peppermint helps people concentrate better when taking tests, and some educators are even encouraging their students to eat a piece of peppermint during tests. Additionally, a study at Wheeling Jesuit University found that peppermint made drivers more alert.

7. Digestion. Peppermint candy made with real peppermint extract can ease gas and bloating and an upset stomach. A chemical in ginger aids upset stomachs by relaxing the intestinal tract. Carrying a few pieces of ginger candy in your pocket may help with nausea, gas and other minor stomach upsets, including motion sickness.

8. Cancer. Researchers at an affiliate of Georgetown University Medical Center found that a compound in cocoa beans slows the growth of cancers and speeds their destruction. The chemical, known as GECGC, was the most effective against fast-growing cancers. It showed positive results against colon, cervical and one line of leukemia cells and was found to be

effective at the concentrations similar to those a person might eat.

9. Coughs. A British study found that two ounces of chocolate was more effective at suppressing chronic coughs than codeine. Chocolate contains theobromine, which calms the vagus nerve, the section of the brain that triggers coughs.

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