

Myths and facts about chocolate from a nutrition professor

January 21 2015

With Valentine's Day just around the corner, does chocolate appeal to you for its flavor, symbolic meaning of love or potential health benefits? Dr. Judith Rodriguez, a nutrition professor and chair of the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of North Florida, discusses myths and facts about chocolate. To help you include chocolate in your diet, a recipe has been provided.

Myth: Chocolate is native to Switzerland.

Fact: The [cacao](#) tree was discovered 2,000 years ago in Mesoamerica. Ancient Maya and Aztec cultures ground the seeds into a paste and made a bitter [chocolate drink](#). The Aztecs often used the cacao seeds as a form of money, in non-sweet main dishes (like today's mole sauces) and some sacred ceremonies. Explorers took the seeds to Spain and cacao was then dispersed throughout Europe. There, new recipes, which included cream and sugar, were created and the new sweet version of a chocolate-based food was developed.

Myth: Cacao and chocolate is the same thing.

Fact: Cacao is the seed of a pod. Cacao, or what is used to make chocolate, is bitter in its raw form. There are different types of chocolate: unsweetened, Dutch, bittersweet, sweet (dark), milk and cocoa. By law, these items differ in terms of cacao content and amounts of other ingredients. For example, sweet chocolate can be 15 to 34 percent cacao. Milk chocolate has about at least 10 percent unsweetened

chocolate plus specific amounts of milk solids and milk fat.

Myth: Chocolate causes acne.

Fact: Scientific evidence supports the fact that chocolate doesn't cause acne or pimples. Moreover, acne doesn't appear to be caused by a specific food but rather by acne-causing bacteria, an excess of skin oil and a buildup of dead cells within the pores.

Myth: Chocolate can cause a heart attack.

Fact: Actually, cacao is associated to a decreased risk of heart disease because of its content of phytochemicals. Cacao may help lower blood pressure, reduce inflammation and increase HDL (good cholesterol). Dark chocolate contains more of these components than [milk chocolate](#), so cocoa and [dark chocolate](#) are recommended over other chocolates.

Myth: White chocolate is chocolate without the coloring.

Fact: Actually, [white chocolate](#) isn't chocolate. It's a confection made with sugar, vanilla, cream and/or milk solids, cocoa butter and doesn't have chocolate liquor.

Crispy Chocolate-Peanut Treat

Ingredients:

12 oz. large marshmallows
¾ cup crunchy peanut butter
6 cups Cocoa Krispies

Directions:

Place the marshmallows and peanut butter in a large microwaveable bowl. Microwave 1 ½ to 2 minutes, until soft enough to add the Cocoa Krispies. Thoroughly mix in the Cocoa Krispies. Pat down in a 13 x 9 x 5/8 inch small cookie sheet. Refrigerate. When cool, cut into 18 squares. Note: this Crispy Chocolate-Peanut Treat will be a bit stickier than the traditional crispy treats because it doesn't contain butter, but will be more nutritious and delicious! You can also top with [chocolate](#) or red sprinkles or cut into heart shapes with a cookie cutter for decoration.

Nutrition Information:

- Calories: 176
- Fat calories: 52 (6 grams fat)
- Protein: 4 grams
- Dietary fiber 1 gram

Provided by University of North Florida

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