

THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF CONSUMING CHOCOLATE CONTAINING COCOA FLAVANOL ON CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE. C.N. Vue, Department of Family, Consumer and Nutritional Sciences, Saint Catherine University, Saint Paul, Minnesota

Many people are consuming chocolate on a daily basis, yet many don't know the health benefits from it. Moderate consumption of chocolate containing cocoa flavanols (CF) is associated with numerous health benefits, particularly towards cardiovascular disease (CVD) by improving blood pressure, increasing HDL levels, and decreasing LDL levels. The objective of this systematic review is to identify the effects of chocolate containing CF on risk for CVD. Today, the death rate for CVD has increased worldwide. With an emphasis on prevention, chocolate has been a main topic in the last few years. A ScienceDirect search was conducted using the search terms "dark chocolate and cardiovascular disease". Articles written in languages other than English were excluded. Six studies were reviewed. Five studies showed that foods containing cocoa flavanols, such as chocolate, increased HDL levels, and decreased LDL levels and total serum cholesterol. One study showed that the more cocoa flavanol there is in a chocolate, i.e. dark chocolate vs milk chocolate, health benefits were higher. Differences were noted by gender such that women had the most significant benefits of improving HDL and reducing LDL levels. Limitations of the studies included self reported diets and quality of chocolate. Future research should address closer observation and accurate measurement of chocolate in the diet to enhance the precision of the results. If choosing to include chocolate in a daily diet, small amounts of consumption is important to reduce the risk for cardiovascular disease.