

Chocolate Matters

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WHAT MATTERS & WHAT COUNTS

Isn't it delightful to know that when it comes to your heart, chocolate matters?

And in more ways than one.

In a world where we are constantly warned of the dangers of so many foods and activities, how refreshing to have such a delicious to-do to add to our self-care list. How exactly can we love our chocolate this Valentine's Day and eat it too? Let us count the ways.

In his book *Authentic Happiness*, Martin Seligman, Ph.D. speaks about the importance of taking time to savor pleasurable moments as a key aspect of a fulfilling life. What could be more delightful to both our physical senses and our sense of connection than sharing a deep, dark chocolate treat with someone special? You might even want to carry a few heart-healthy chocolate goodies in your purse and when the moment is ripe, enjoy a chocolate moment with a friend.

On the cover of *Chocolate: Treat Yourself to a Healthy Heart*, author Barbara Wexler, MPH, states, "Recent research has shown that bioflavonoids in chocolate help keep blood vessels healthy and help protect against high blood pressure, elevated LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels and unhealthy blood clotting inside." The key is high-quality dark chocolate in moderate amounts.

Along with the heart-health benefits and the energizing jolt of caffeine, chocolate also contains tryptophan, which the brain uses to make serotonin, the feel-good chemical that regulates mood, sleep, sexuality and appetite. No wonder we reach for that yummy choco-

late treat when we are feeling out of sorts or down in the dumps.

Be sure to choose all-natural chocolates that are minimally sweetened. There are even brands that contribute to saving the rain forests or the planet, thus making your indulgence beneficial to many, which in itself can be a heartfelt thing to do. In addition to your daily chocolate treat, try adding raw cacao powder to your morning shake or coffee.

Now, let's talk sex. Martha Hopkins and Randall Lockridge in their gorgeous book *Inter Courses*, an aphrodisiac cookbook, include legends involving cacao beans that go back to ancient civilizations—from wild orgies celebrating a harvest to Aztec ruler Montezuma's daily consumption to "better serve his harem of 600 women."

New scientific research shows the PEA (phenylethylamine) in chocolate is also the neuro chemical that runs through the veins of those who are newly and giddily in love. No matter how corny or supposedly commercial it seems, never underestimate the power (or metaphorical significance) of someone showing up at your door with a heart-shaped box of chocolates. ♡

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Check out Minx Boren's blog at vivemagazine.com for more coaching tips and to interact with other *Vive* readers.

