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Chocolate is good for you - official



A little of what you fancy does you good

Chocoholics around the world can take heart from new research which shows chocolate can help you live longer - as long as you don't eat too much of it.

According to US research, people who eat chocolate and sweets up to three times a month live almost a year longer than those who eat too much or those who steer clear of the substance altogether.

Researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health studied almost 8,000 American men aged around 65 for a five-year period.

The results were adjusted for other risk factors, including smoking.

People who consumed a moderate amount of chocolate survived longer than those who ate sweets three or more times a week and those who never touched sweets.

"As with most things in life, moderation seems to be paramount," the researchers wrote in the British Medical Journal.

Heart disease and cancer

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Although the test included both chocolate and sweets, the researchers believe chocolate is the key to a longer life.

They believe it contains substances that protect against heart disease and cancer.

Chocolate, like red wine - which is also said to protect against heart disease, is believed to contain chemicals called phenols.

These reduce the presence of free radicals that damage cells and DNA, causing disease.

The researchers also think the cacao plant, from which chocolate and cocoa is derived, may restrict the formation of the type of cholesterol which damages the heart as well as boosting the immune system.

However, chocolate is high in calories and eating too much can therefore make you fat, increasing your risk of heart disease.

Chocolate, which originates from the Aztecs and was brought to Europe after the conquest of South America, is big business.

The average American eats around 6.5 kilograms of it a year.