

Chocolate and cocoa: at last some good news for chocolate addicts

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Cochrane Review: Ried K, Fakler P, Stocks NP. Effect of cocoa on blood pressure. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2017, Issue 4.

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The Problem: Hypertension is a known public health problem that affects both the economic developed and developing world and affects somewhere between 25–33% of the adult population.¹ It is one of the leading factors attributing to global mortality and is the third highest risk factor for the global burden of disease.² This research examined the use of cocoa as a potential antihypertensive. It is the flavanols contained within the cocoa that is thought to be responsible for antihypertensive action.³

Clinical Bottom Line: This Cochrane review showed that cocoa delivered either as a commercially available chocolate or as cocoa powder, will reduce systolic and diastolic blood pressure.⁴ The antihypertensive effect appeared to be strongest among individuals with pre-existing hypertension where the addition of cocoa to the diet reduced systolic blood pressure by 4 mmHg (6.71–1.30).

Outcome measured	Success	Evidence	Harms
Systolic blood pressure	Overall the mean systolic blood pressure in the groups that received cocoa was 1.76 mm Hg (CI = 3.09 to 0.43) lower than those in the control group. If trials only included hypertensive patients, the systolic blood pressures were lowered by 4 mm Hg (6.71–1.30). If trials only included normotensive patients, the systolic blood pressure was not significantly lowered.	This was based on 35 trials including 1804 participants. 9 trials including 401 participants looked at hypertensive patients 20 trials including 1063 participants looked at normotensive patients.	9 trials reported participants that had withdrawn due to adverse events. These included gastrointestinal complaints, dislike of the trial product, headache and jitteriness.
Diastolic blood pressure	The mean diastolic blood pressure in the group that received cocoa was 1.76 mm Hg (CI = 2.57 to 0.94) lower than those in the control group.	This was based on evidence from 34 trials including 1772 participants.	

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