



## Chocolate's Dark Magic

By Lynn Okura



Photo: © 2009 Jupiterimages Corporation

Have you ever wondered what nutritionists eat? Surely their diets must consist of leafy greens, whole grains and the lean proteins they tout. Nutritionist Dr. Susan Mitchell does practice what she preaches, but says her healthy diet also includes one guilty pleasure. "Dark chocolate is my love," she says. "I have a piece almost every day of my life."

A woman's love for chocolate can range from a casual affair to the declaration that chocolate is better than sex, as Dr. Mitchell discovered while writing her book *I'd Kill for a Cookie*. In her research, Dr. Mitchell found that chocolate is hands down the number one food women crave.

### A Crave-Inducing Combination

Together, Dr. Mitchell says the ingredients in chocolate create a powerful blend. "The combination gives you that overall optimum brain happiness," Dr. Mitchell says.

- Theobromine: A caffeine-like stimulant that perks you up.
- Tryptophane: Increases the brain's serotonin levels for a happy, feel-good result.
- Phenethylamine: Releases endorphins, causing feelings of passion and love.
- Sugar and fat: The unbeatable duo that gives chocolate its delectable creamy texture.

### The Health Benefits

Cacao contains flavonoids, the antioxidant found in chocolate and red wine. Emerging research claims that flavonoids in dark chocolate can increase blood flow, which could help reduce high blood pressure. "As a general rule, the higher percentage of cacao equals a higher percentage of flavonoids," Dr. Mitchell says.

### Not All Chocolate Is Created Equal

When choosing your chocolate, Dr. Mitchell says it's important to become a label sleuth. Compare labels and find the highest percentage of cacao you can. Because there are more flavonoids in dark chocolate, milk chocolate does not have the health benefits of dark chocolate.

Dr. Mitchell says a piece of dark chocolate will usually have between 60 and 100 calories, depending on the size. Look at the label look for a low amount of saturated fat and zero trans fat, which Dr. Mitchell says is often added from milk fat, coconut oil or palm oil. Even after you've found your favorite, keep checking the label. "Some of the best brands have started adding milk fat in the last year or so," Dr. Mitchell says. "Turn it over and see if they've changed any of the ingredients."

### Have Your Dark Chocolate Cake and Eat It Too

Dark chocolate may not be fat-free, but Dr. Mitchell says that if it's what you crave, enjoy it. "I've given myself permission to pamper without guilt," she says. "Chocolate should be something to look forward to and enjoy. We beat ourselves up enough every day."

### Delectable Dark Chocolate Recipes





**Mini Dark  
Chocolate Bundts**



**Dark Chocolate  
Bark**



**Dark Chocolate  
Frosting**

OPRAH.COM