

Chocolate: Is It Animal, Vegetable or Mineral?

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Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral? It's all three! Most of the time we forget where **CHOCOLATE** comes from since we are so enamored with its sensual pleasures of fragrance, texture, and most of all flavor. But just to remind you of its more functional benefits let me tell about what chocolate can do for you.

Chocolate is made from cacao beans or the seeds of the cacao plant, hence its **vegetable** nature. These are roasted and hulled like any other seed, leaving the cacao nibs which contain the chocolate flavor. These are ground and pressed producing a pressed cake and cocoa butter. Now for the good stuff...the cake, some of the cocoa butter, sugar and other ingredients are mixed to make the delicacy we all crave...especially in February... *dark chocolate*. Milk can be added (its **animal** nature) to produce *milk chocolate*. Cocoa butter, milk and vanilla are combined to make *white chocolate*.

So, that takes care of the animal and the vegetable but what about the **mineral**? Chocolate contains Magnesium, Copper, Potassium, Calcium, Iron, Phosphorus and Zinc. One ounce of dark chocolate gives you 14 % of your *Daily Value* of Copper (Cu) and 11.5 % of your Daily Value of Magnesium (Mg). Remember each of these minerals is an **ESSENTIAL** nutrient which means that they are essential for life. They each have specific functions to perform in your body which cannot be performed by any other substance. For instance, Magnesium is needed to make over 300 different enzymes with functions such as energy production, protein synthesis, to make structures such as bones and chromosomes and to makes some antioxidants.

That brings us to the benefits you get from substances that are not nutrients but are contained in chocolate. These are called *phytochemicals* or plant chemicals. These phytochemicals act as *antioxidants* which prevent damage to cells. Preventing this damage is a great way to prevent, delay, or minimize chronic diseases including heart disease and cancer. The *phytochemicals* in chocolate are substances called *flavonoids*. Flavonoids may lower LDL cholesterol or “bad” cholesterol, lower blood pressure, and reduce risk of blood clots. Dark chocolate will give you the most benefit from antioxidants.

Of course, eat chocolate in moderation since it does contain fat, sugar and therefore calories. Choose dark chocolate which has 60% or more cacao and eat an ounce a day for a healthy treat.

So, remember when you give someone chocolate on Valentine's Day or any day, it is not only an act of love. It is healthy for them, too.

09/2017



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