# Chocolate: officially good for you!



The age-old debate about the health benefits of chocolate has taken a positive turn with recent insights highlighting its impact on brain health and cognitive function. Jason Vishnefske, a master chocolatier with Santa Barbara Chocolate, has come up with an in-depth explanation about the role of chocolate in enhancing cognition and overall brain health.

Flavonoids in dark chocolate are at the forefront of this discussion. These powerful antioxidants are known to improve blood flow to the brain, which can enhance cognitive function and potentially mitigate cognitive decline over time. "Flavonoids promote better memory retention and recall," explains Jason, drawing attention to the brain-boosting potential of these compounds.

In addition to flavonoids, chocolate contains caffeine and theobromine, both of which are significant contributors to its cognitive benefits. Caffeine, widely recognized as a stimulant, is effective in increasing alertness and attention, thereby improving cognitive performance and mental clarity. On the other hand, theobromine, also found in chocolate, helps to maintain alertness and focus while promoting relaxation by dilating blood vessels. This balance of stimulation and relaxation is unique to chocolate and contributes to its reputation as a mental enhancer and stress alleviator.

Also, the effect on neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine is crucial. Serotonin, often referred to as the "happiness neurotransmitter," can enhance feelings of well-being and relaxation, potentially alleviating stress and anxiety. Dopamine, involved in reward and pleasure pathways, can elevate mood and provide a sense of satisfaction. Jason notes that the consumption of chocolate, especially dark chocolate rich in cocoa solids, stimulates the release of these neurotransmitters, leading to temporary mood elevation and improved cognitive function.

Choosing the right type of chocolate is also essential for maximizing health benefits. Dark chocolate with at least 70% cocoa solids is recommended due to its higher antioxidant content. This type of chocolate not only supports heart health and improves blood flow but also offers notable cognitive benefits. Jason suggests moderation as the key, given that even dark chocolate contains sugar and calories. Furthermore, opting for chocolate with minimal added ingredients and avoiding those with high sugar and saturated fat content can aid in reaping the most health advantages.