

## **Can Chocolate Give You Youthful Skin?**

By Stephanie Nolasco, July 08, 2013



**E**veryone is familiar with applying sunscreen to put damaging sun rays at bay. But can eating chocolate have similar effects?

A recent study by a group of London scientists found that those who ate 20 grams of dark chocolate for 12 weeks were able to stay in the sun for twice as long without getting burned in comparison to those who ate none.

In 2009, the *Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology* revealed that dark chocolate offers significant protection against harmful UV effects from the sun, which can cause premature aging. And in 2006, German scientists also found chocolate can help protect against the rays that cause cancer.

“Scientific data supports eating chocolate high in flavanoids, an antioxidant compound typically found in dark chocolate, can protect your skin, primarily against sunburn and UV damage,” says cosmetic dermatologist Dr. Oscar Hevia. “One study did show that after three months, ingestion of high flavanol chocolate also improved skin thickness, hydration, and microcirculation, thereby improving the appearance of skin.”

“If you are going to eat chocolate for its health benefits, you should focus on dark chocolate or cocoa powder, which has a much higher concentration of the beneficial antioxidants,” Hevia adds.

Pass the Godiva? Not so fast.

“It is the cocoa bean itself that provides strong antioxidant benefits when ingested, not the other ingredients in chocolate or cocoa powder,” says Dr. Jessica Krant, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at SUNY Downstate Medical Center in New York City. “This matters because chocolate quality varies greatly, and even so-called dark chocolate can have much less of the healthy antioxidant molecules than we expect. Milk chocolate hardly has any.”

While chocolate can help the skin fight the damaging effects of the sun, Dr. Krant also says one should specifically look for high-quality cocoa or, as she describes, “the kind that almost doesn’t taste good.”

“I would definitely recommend eating small amounts of extremely dark chocolate with little fat as a type of overall anti-cancer and anti-aging agent, but caution against eating large amounts of any version, especially high in sugar,” she says. “Processed sugars will lead to increased inflammation and the risk of worsening acne and other inflammatory conditions, such as diabetes or heart diseases.”

**Gary Goldenberg**, medical director of Mount Sinai Dermatology in New York City, says this treat should be enjoyed in moderation to help ease elasticity and dryness, both which can be affected by the sun.

“Oxidative stress is one of the main enemies of the skin and it’s due to UV exposure, chemicals, and environmental pollutants that cause release of free radicals,” he explains. “These, in turn, damage the top and middle layers of the skin, where collagen lives. This is where chocolate comes in to help. Dark chocolate greater than 70 percent cocoa has the greatest benefit for the skin.”

“Whether it’s a topical cream with cocoa, a chocolate wrap at a spa, or simply a piece of dark chocolate, go ahead and enjoy,” says Dr. Goldenberg. “It’s good for you.”