Dark chocolate may lower inflammation

Dark chocolate has gained a considerable amount of interest in recent years due to reports that it may lower the risk of cardiovascular disease. One proposed mechanism for this is that flavanols in cocoa may reduce inflammation. Researchers in Italy recently conducted a cross-sectional study of 4,849 healthy adults, to examine the relationship between dark chocolate consumption and C-reactive protein (CRP), a marker of inflammation (1). They compared those individuals who never ate any chocolate (n = 1,317) to those who regularly consumed dark chocolate only (n = 824). The median daily intake by consumers was 5.7 grams (0.2 ounce) of dark chocolate. High-sensitivity CRP was measured to assess level of inflammation, and nutrient intake was evaluated using a food frequency questionnaire. After adjusting for age, sex, social status, physical activity, blood pressure, body mass index, waist:hip ratio, specific food groups, and total energy intake, consumption of dark chocolate was inversely related to CRP. The dose-response curve was found to be J-shaped, indicating that individuals who regularly consume small amounts of dark chocolate tend to have the lowest CRP levels, thus suggesting lower levels of inflammation. The results from this study support the hypothesis that regular consumption of small amounts of dark chocolate may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease by decreasing inflammation.

Adapted from:

1. Di Giuseppe R, Di Castelnuovo A, Centritto F, Zito F, De Curtis A, Costanzo S, Vohnout B, Sieri S, Krogh V, Donati MB, De Gaetano G, Iacoviello L. Regular consumption of dark chocolate is associated with low serum concentrations of C-reactive protein in a healthy Italian population. *The Journal of Nutrition*. 2008;138(10):1939-45.