Chocolate – Food Of The Gods

by Alan Guy Luke

Grenada – Raw cocoa beans (left) compared to a single nutmeg shell (right) harvested from their pods

It is good for your cardiovascular system and may even protect your body’s cells from degenerative disorders. But best of all, it is definitely delightfully delicious.

History of Chocolate

Theobroma cacao (‘food of the gods’) has been in existence as long as Aztec taste buds. The appreciation of chocolate dates from ancient central American civilizations. Legend prevails that Quetzalcoatl (god of air, light and life) stole the cacao-tree for the Aztecs and chocolate emerged from these roots, so to speak. The Mexican Indian word for ‘chocolate’ was derived from the term xocoatl (‘bitter water”). Another belief is that the word came from the choco-choco sound heard when natives stirred the drink into a bubbly froth using a molinet (a paddled device).

In 1519, Hernando Cortez tasted ‘Cacahuatl’, a drink enjoyed by Montezuma II, the last Aztec emperor. Cortez observed that the Aztecs treated cacao beans, used to make the drink, as priceless and also used them as monetary exchange. It was during this period that Cortez’ men first learned to drink the bitter beverage. For 90% of its lengthy history, chocolate was drunk, not eaten. The Maya and Olmec added various flavourings and seasonings such as honey and chili peppers. It was not until the cultivation of sugar cane that the sweet chocolate drink was developed.

Columbus returned from his fourth voyage to the ‘New World’ with cacao beans but King Ferdinand initially overlooked them in favour of other assorted treasures. By the end of the 16th century, regular cargoes were being shipped to Spain where it became so popular that it was heavily taxed by the government. This established chocolate as an elite libation and it eventually spread through Europe as a beverage of the privileged classes.

Columbus returned from his fourth voyage to the ‘New World’ with cacao beans but King Ferdinand initially overlooked them in favour of other assorted treasures. By the end of the 16th century, regular cargoes were being shipped to Spain where it became so popular that it was heavily taxed by the government. This established chocolate as an elite libation and it eventually spread through Europe as a beverage of the privileged classes.

Forgotten English terms such as ‘Chocolate House’ has been found in 19th century books. In Zell’s Popular Encyclopaedia (1871) and Whitney’s Century Dictionary (1889) it has been identified as a public house, or house of entertainment where chocolate is drunk. The first ‘chocolate house’ was reputedly opened in London in 1657 by a Frenchman. Chocolate first appeared in North America in 1765, while still a British colony, when introduced in Dorchester, Massachusetts, where the first chocolate factory was established.

In 1828, Dutch chocolate maker C J Van Houten invented the cocoa press. This machine squeezed cocoa butter out of the beans and treated the cocoa with an alkalizing agent to improve the colour and flavour. The process became known as ‘dutching’, and cocoa processed this way is called Dutch chocolate. Swiss chocolate refers to the confection’s nationality. The European pioneers and masters of chocolate invented milk chocolate in 1876. Daniel Peter, a Swiss candy maker, developed milk chocolate by adding condensed milk to chocolate liquor (the non-alcoholic by-product of cocoa’s inner meat).

Market Today

There are 3.5 trillion cocoa beans harvested worldwide every year, with West Africa’s Ivory Coast being the
largest producer. Over the years, several chocolate companies have been established worldwide, primarily in Europe. The Swiss company Lindt, the Belgian company Neuhaus and the French company Ganon are all renowned for their gourmet chocolates. One can also visit chocolate museums in various countries. While Hershey has Chocolate World in Pennsylvania, Cadbury, who manufactured its first chocolate in 1897, has a Cadbury World in Birmingham, England. Germany has three chocolate museums, and there are two in Canada, both located in Quebec.

St Valentine’s Day is the lovers’ holiday where often heart-shaped boxes of chocolate are exchanged. In Japan, St Valentine’s Day is extremely popular. Girls express love to boys by presenting chocolate as a symbol of their love.

The Addiction to Chocolate

No matter what your type of chocolate (white, dark, milk), or favourite brand, one can easily become addicted to the popular confection. Neurologists have discovered that the pleasant feelings associated with chocolate consumption are due to the increased blood flow to the midbrain and orbital frontal cortex, which are also activated by addictive drugs (i.e. cocaine).

Many researchers and food scientists have reported chocolate as being the single most craved food item. Chocolate consumption triggers an endorphin-release which reduces pain sensitivity and contributes to the inner warmth of the chocoholic. This makes one feel like they are in love, and some even maintain it is better than sex. Chocoholics even have their own website where they maintain that “If you’ve got melted chocolate all over your hands, you’re eating it too slowly.” There is also a women’s whimsical top ten list of why chocolate is better than sex. Included are such reasons as ‘you are never too young or too old for chocolate’ and ‘you can make chocolate last as long as you want it to’.

According to an Agence France Press report, London psychologist David Lewis led a study which recorded heart rate and brain activity in people who consumed chocolate in goblets prior to entering his harem, leading to the belief that the confection is an aphrodisiac. As a sacred concoction, it was used in religious ceremonies and was associated with Xochiquetzal (goddess of fertility). Italian libertine, Giacomo Casanova (1725-1798), indulged in the delightful dark drink prior to his dubious debauched deeds. Henceforth, he helped perpetuate the reputed subtle aphrodisiac properties of chocolate. Louis XIV of France also helped to further popularize chocolate’s reputation.

Benefits of Chocolate

Several other chemical elements contribute to this psychoactive food being a healthy product. British scientists discovered its primary ingredient, theobromine, provided more relief from chronic coughs than did codeine-based commercial syrups due to its action on the vagus nerve. Chocolate is a good source of flavonoids and contains tryptophan, an essential amino acid. The antioxidant, polyphenols, found in dark chocolate, reduce oxidation of low-density lipoproteins (LDL or ‘bad cholesterol’) and, therefore, may aid in protecting against heart disease. The heart-healthy flavonol factor reduces blood clotting and may stabilize arterial plaque, thereby reducing the chance of strokes and heart attacks. It also triggers the production of nitric oxide which increases blood flow and maintains flexible arteries.

University of California researchers reported heart benefits from the pairing of chocolate and citrus fruit. Consequently, ascorbic acid (found in citrus) releases more of cocoa’s heart protective anti-oxidants. Chocolate also contains catechins that may aid in protecting the body against degenerative illnesses (i.e. cancer). Cocoa itself contains procyanidins that help protect the body’s cells from damage by free radicals which cause some age-related diseases.

The average chocolate bar has a caffeine content of 30 mg while a cup of coffee has more than 100 mg. Generally, dark chocolate becomes more bitter as the cocoa content increases.
Neurologists have discovered that the pleasant feelings associated with chocolate consumption are due to the increased blood flow to the midbrain and orbital frontal cortex, which are also activated by addictive drugs (i.e. cocaine). Chocolate consumption triggers an endorphin-release which reduces pain sensitivity and contributes to the inner warmth of the chocoholic.

Processed cocoa. This makes it ideal to utilize in medical research due to its extremely high levels of flavonoids. Studies have found that pure cocoa powder (not the instant hot chocolate variety) has the most antioxidants.

Several health-related common fallacies that should be debunked include migraines, acne and obesity. Chocolate does not induce migraines by itself - a number of triggering mechanisms (i.e. stress, fatigue) need to be present for it to play a role. Remember: ‘stressed’ is ‘desserts’ spelled backwards. There is no evidence that chocolate consumption results in acne, nor are there any inherent compounds that would exacerbate the epidermal condition. In reference to it contributing to obesity, an individual with a healthy diet can safely eat chocolate in moderation without fear of weight gain. Katherine Hepburn, the late ultra-slim actress, once stated: “my figure is the result of a lifetime of chocolate eating”.

A variety of elements affect our system internally. Utilizing chocolate for an external application is also quite effective. The Spa at The Hotel Hershey features unique chocolate treatments. This spa sanctuary offers aromas, flavours and textures providing treatments, including Chocolate Mud Hydrotherapy, Whipped Cocoa Baths and Chocolate Fondue Wraps.

Going Big

Unveiled at Hershey headquarters in 2003 was the world’s largest Hershey Kiss. It weighs almost 3,000 kilos (6,433 lbs) and stands two metres (61/2 feet) high. There are 20 to 25 million regular Hershey Kisses manufactured daily. The Hershey Company was commissioned to produce chocolate bars for soldiers during various wars. For the Gulf War they were actually able to create a bar to withstand temperatures up to 140°F without melting.

Also in the quaint Pennsylvania town of Hershey is an immense amusement park, Chocolate World, with distinctive attractions for families. It is regarded as one of the finest factory tours for children in the United States. It’s no wonder that Tim Burton has created a version of Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory (1971) entitled: Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (2005), starring Johnny Depp. Depp also appeared in the Oscar-nominated Chocolat (1989). This was a captivating story of a woman (Juliette Binoche) and the influence of her chocolate shop on French villagers. She was able to determine an individual’s favourite type of chocolate by their personality.

Other films released in the 1990s include Better Than Chocolate (1999), Like Water for Chocolate (1992) and Hot Chocolate (1992). The latter involves a millionaire Texas cow-girl (Bo Derek) who wants to buy a French chocolate factory which is going broke. In the Oscar-winning film Forrest Gump, Forrest (Tom Hanks) made the statement: “Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re gonna get”. Black and white films such as Psycho (1960), Night of the Living Dead (1968) and Raging Bull (1980) utilized chocolate syrup (Bosco) as blood due to its inherent viscosity.

In the longest running animated television series, The Simpsons, Homer J Simpson glutonously engorged himself during the Land of Chocolate (1991) episode. The patriarch was euphorically enveloped by a surreal surfeit of chocolate candy in a salivating sequence of homeresque indulgence. Television’s I Love Lucy show had Lucille Ball in a classic confection conveyer belt scene. Attempting to maintain the assembly line pace, she frantically consumes the chocolates she cannot wrap as the speed increases in the Job Switching episode.
Chocolate also contains catechins that may aid in protecting the body against degenerative illnesses (i.e. cancer). Cocoa itself contains procyanidins that help protect the body’s cells from damage by free radicals which cause some age-related diseases.

Lucy may have devoured a plenitude of chocolate in desperation, but the Swiss claim to consume the most chocolate. Their annual consumption is estimated at over 11 kilograms (24 lbs) of chocolate per person. Germany follows at ten kilograms (22 lbs), while North Americans average only five kilograms (11 lbs), according to industry statistics.

Chocolate itself holds various records in different forms. The largest chocolate waterfall (located in Alaska) cascades 20 feet. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the largest cookie was a colossal chocolate chip creation with a diameter of 24.9 meters (81 feet, 8 inches). The super-sized snack was made in 1996 by Mayell Foods Ltd of Christchurch, New Zealand. Legend has it that the first chocolate chip cookies were baked around 1930 in the Toll House Inn (1708) located in Massachusetts. Chocolate bits were added to basic butter cookies creating the Toll House cookie which would become a national product.

The largest chunk of chocolate was displayed at the Eurochocolate 2000 Exhibition in Turin, Italy. Made by the Elah-Dufour United Food Companies Ltd, the big bar weighed in at 2,280 kilograms (5,026 lbs). Guinness records the largest box of chocolates ever made is a Frango mint chocolate box weighing 1,463 kilograms (3,226 lbs). It was created in 2002 in Chicago, Illinois, by Marshall Fields.

Now I believe it is time to open a big ballantine box of chocolates, sip on a couple of chocolate martinis, and enjoy a musical interlude of Cat Stevens’ Buddha and the Chocolate Box, while being thankful to theobroma cacao for palatably permeating our cultures and lifestyles.

Recipe
Chocolate Martini
2 oz Chocolate liqueur
1½ oz Vodka
½ oz grated chocolate

About the Author
Alan Luke and Jacquie Durand are a writer-photographer team. They reside in Ajax, Ontario (Canada) and are members of the Travel Media Association of Canada (TMAC). Both strongly believe chocolate consumption should be subsidized by the World Health Organization (WHO). They may be contacted via aluketravel@rogers.com; www.travelmedia.ca

Practical Information
Internet
www.chocolate.org/refs/
www.chocoholic.com
www.fieldmuseum.org/chocolate

Credits

Is it Chronic Fatigue Syndrome?
Is it Myalgic Encephalomyelitis?
Or just plain Temporo-Mandibular Joint disorder?

Some 60% of the sensory input to your brain comes from the Trigeminal nerve which supplies the teeth, jaws and in fact the whole of the head. Any asymmetries affect the input from this nerve to the brain and a consequent widespread response resulting in a myriad of symptoms. Where there is a conglomeration of a huge number of symptoms patients get classified into ME/CFS.

The diagrams below show the nerve and its distribution.

Extensive experience in the treatment of very many patients shows that addressing the asymmetry of your teeth and jaws corrects the problem underlying this illness.

To get a better perspective on your illness please read the articles on the links below:

Dr M Amir BDS LDS RCS (Eng)
MSc (Univ. of London)
Dental Surgeon
50B Lower Richmond Road
Putney, London SW15 1JT
Tel: 020-8780 3433
amir2647@msn.com