

## **Dark Chocolate Increases Attention and Alertness while Improving Blood Flow**

*By: Amy Goodrich, Natural News*

There is some good news for the chocolate lovers out there: a new study carried out by researchers from Northern Arizona University reveals that the intake of dark chocolate with at least 60 percent cacao could be the key to improving attention and alertness and get you through the afternoon slump.

"Chocolate is indeed a stimulant and it activates the brain in a really special way," said Dr. Larry Stevens, a professor of psychological sciences at Northern Arizona University. "It can increase brain characteristics of attention, and it also significantly affects blood pressure levels."

The study was published in the journal *NeuroRegulation* and sponsored by American chocolate manufacturer the Hershey Company. The study is actually the first of its kind to investigate the influence that chocolate has on brain activity and attention using the electroencephalography (EEG) technique. With EEG, it is possible to take images of the brain's activity while performing cognitive tasks.

For the study, Stevens and his team recruited 122 volunteers aged between 18 and 25. They were all given one of the following options: chocolate with high cacao content (60 percent), chocolate with low cacao content (0 percent), high cacao chocolate with added L-theanine (the amino acid found in green tea), high-sugar water, low-sugar water, or just plain water.

They examined the EEG activity, mood and blood pressure of all participants before and after consuming one of the six options while performing certain cognitive tasks. Both the group that ate the chocolate with 60 percent cacao and the one with added L-theanine outperformed the groups that did not eat dark chocolate at all.

"A lot of us in the afternoon get a little fuzzy and can't pay attention, particularly students, so we could have a higher cacao content chocolate bar and it would increase attention," Stevens said.

He further notes that only dark chocolate that contains at least 60 percent cacao will boost alertness and attention, not the sugary, milky stuff a normal chocolate bar provides.

Stevens and his team also found that eating dark chocolate raises blood pressure. That's where the chocolate/L-theanine combination kicks in: L-theanine acts as a relaxant that lowers blood

pressure.

"L-theanine is a really fascinating product that lowers blood pressure and produces what we call alpha waves in the brain that are very calm and peaceful," Stevens said.

"We thought that if chocolate acutely elevates blood pressure, and L-theanine lowers blood pressure, then maybe the L-theanine would counteract the short-term hypertensive effects of chocolate."

Although the combination isn't available yet, Hershey, who supported the project, is interested in making this new form of chocolate. Stevens hopes that this study will encourage other manufacturers to do their research on the effects of cacao and L-theanine.

"It's remarkable. The potential here is for a heart healthy chocolate confection that contains a high level of cacao with L-theanine that is good for your heart, lowers blood pressure, and helps you pay attention," Stevens said. "People don't generally eat chocolate and think it's going to be healthy for them," he added.

Instead of grabbing a coffee or energy drink, dark chocolate with L-theanine might become a healthier and heart-friendly option to get you through a tough day in the future.

However, more research needs to be done to support this claim and see whether this breaking news isn't just a money-generating collaboration between researchers and the chocolate manufacturer who helped fund the project.

**Sources:**

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk>

<http://www.neuroregulation.org>

<http://news.nau.edu>