Chocolate: Sweets for the Heart

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Eating one small square of chocolate a day might help lower your blood pressure, according to a study published in the European Society of Cardiology's *European Heart Journal*.

For the study, researchers evaluated the diet and health habits of 19,357 people, ages 35 to 65, during a 10-year period. They found that people who ate an average of 7.5 grams or 0.3 ounces of chocolate a day had lower blood pressure and were 39 percent less likely to experience a heart attack compared with those who ate the least chocolate (1.7 grams or 0.06 ounces) daily.

According to press materials from the European Society of Cardiology, this means that if the people eating the least amount of the luscious sweet increased their chocolate munching by 6 grams [0.2 ounces] each day, there'd be about 85 fewer heart attacks and strokes per 10,000 people over a period of about 10 years, explained Brian Buijsse, MD, the study's leader and a nutritional epidemiologist at the German Institute of Human Nutrition.

"If the 39 percent lower risk is generalized to the general population, the number of avoidable heart attacks and strokes could be higher because the absolute risk in the general population is higher," Buijsse added.

But before you rush to the nearest chocolatier, researchers warned, take heed. Your chocolate consumption shouldn't increase your overall calorie intake or reduce healthy food choices.

What researchers wanted people to remember is that although small amounts of chocolate may prevent heart disease, the delicious treat only does so if it replaces other high-calorie snacks to maintain body weight.

For more information on preventing heart disease with proper nutrition, watch Emmitt Smith, former NFL running back and record holder, discuss that topic on Real Health TV.

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