

CocoaVia

Dark chocolate is rich in flavanols, a compound which improves blood flow, depression, and memory.

The Mars Candy company has a medical branch which is exploring the benefits of flavanols from cocoa beans. In 2014 they funded research testing their cocoa extract and found it did indeed improve memory in adults age 50-70. The study was published in a leading scientific journal, *Nature Neuroscience*. It took about 3 months to see a benefit, and the benefits were profound. The lead investigator commented that “someone who began with a typical memory for a 60-year-old developed a memory more like a 30- or 40-year-old.” The flavanols also lead to improved function in the brain’s memory center (the hippocampus’ dentate gyrus).

These results have been confirmed by several other studies of cocoa and other flavanols.



Quick Facts: CocoaVia	
How natural?	A natural part of the diet.
Mental Benefits	Memory, possibly prevents depression
Other benefits	Lowers blood pressure, cholesterol, inflammation, and risk of heart attacks, stroke, and dementia.
Side effects	None known.
How to find it	We keep links to the lowest cost product at moodtreatmentcenter.com/products (under Vitamins & Herbs) CocoaVia is available as a capsule or powdered dark-chocolate drink. Both work the same and deliver the same flavanols.
Dose	The study used 900mg daily of cocoa flavanols in a powdered-drink form. CocoaVia is commercially available as 375mg per day (either as 3 capsules or a powder-packet (which dissolves in warm liquid). This lower dose likely provides some benefit, so I recommend starting there. If you don't see improvement after 2-3 months, try the 900mg (7 capsules daily, or 2 powder-packs daily would be close).
Similar products	The People's Pharmacy recommends CocoaVia, which is the product used in this study. There are other flavanol products available that likely have similar benefits. Examples include ReserveAge Organics CocoaWell and CocoaWell Cocoa Science.
Cost	Approximately \$1.30-1.50/day for 375mg daily

Can you get this from your diet?

Studies do find that a flavanol-rich diet improves memory and prevents depression. Besides dark chocolate, foods high in flavanols include tea (black/green), berries, citrus fruits, and red wine. To get the brain

benefits, you'd need to eat about a cup of berries or a few oranges a week; or 3-6 cups of tea a day.

Chocolate and wine should be eaten in moderation. Wine starts to have toxic effects on the body that outweigh its benefits once you get beyond 5 ounces a day.

The main risks of chocolate are those that come with sugar and calories, including diabetes, obesity, and dental problems. Add insomnia to that list: dark chocolate has lots of caffeine. A few ounces of dark chocolate a day (at least 70% cocoa) will likely have some benefit, but it would be mild compared to a concentrated form like CocoaVia. You would need to eat about eight bars of dark chocolate or 30 bars of milk chocolate to get the flavanols in a 375mg dose of CocoaVia, so the concentrated capsules allows you to reap the benefits without all those calories.

There is also concern that the heat involved in processing chocolate can destroy its flavanols, particularly Dutch processed (or alkali processed) chocolate.

Some of the foods that contain flavanols, including dark chocolate and CocoaVia, contain oxalate which increases the risk of kidney stones particularly in people sensitive to oxalate stones. Other healthy foods that can increase that risk include tumeric (curcumin), tea, berries, and nuts. For a thorough list of high oxalate foods see:

<https://regepi.bwh.harvard.edu/health/Oxalate/files>

Staying well hydrated can reduce the risk of renal stones.

CocoaVia does have small amounts of calories and caffeine. A standard 375mg-flavanol serving contains 20-30mg of caffeine (as much as a cup of tea) and 10 calories in the pill form or 25 calories in the powder form.

Read more at: www.marscocoascience.com, www.cocoavia.com

—Chris Aiken, M.D. Updated 03/23/2021