

Dive in!

Celebrate the joys and benefits of chocolate

When it comes to understanding the chemistry and nutrition of chocolate, Dr. Joe Vinson's findings are just delicious.

The University of Scranton professor is an expert on chocolate and antioxidants who enjoys sharing the news that chocolate (in moderation, of course) isn't bad for your health. In fact, it's actually good for you.

Can you hear the collective sigh of relief from chocoholics across the land? With 36 million people receiving heart-shaped boxes of chocolate on Valentine's Day*, this is indeed good news. "For those people who want to eat chocolate, I'm not going to tell them not to," Vinson said.

Vinson's studies were not funded by chocolate companies and his group had unknown samples to measure. On a quest for antioxidants, cocoa came out the winner, boasting the most antioxidants. Dark chocolate offers the second most, and milk chocolate finishes in third place.

This made us wonder, where does white chocolate fit into the antioxidant mix?

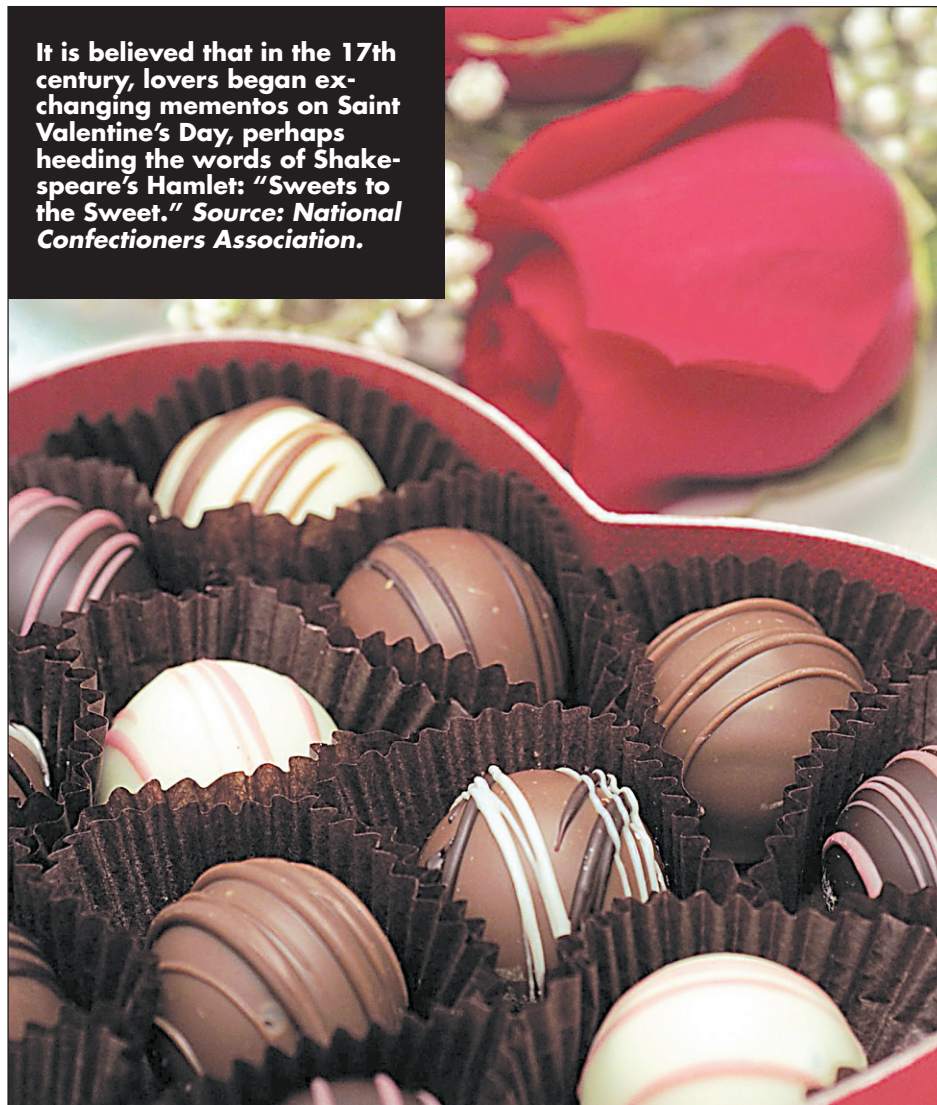
Well, it comes up short. White chocolate has zero antioxidants. "The worst thing you can eat is white chocolate," Dr. Vinson said.

Antioxidants are important because they protect our cells against the effect of free radicals, which are the molecules produced when your body breaks down food or by environmental exposures, such as tobacco smoke and radiation. According to the National Institute of Health, free radicals can damage cells and may play a role in heart disease, cancer and other diseases.

If you want to buy chocolate that is high in antioxidants, Dr. Vinson said to read those labels. In the last five years, chocolate companies started to indicate the percentage of cocoa on chocolate bar labels. "If you look at the percentage, it pretty well mirrors the percentage of antioxidant concentration," Dr. Vinson said. "So if you consume 70 percent versus 35 cocoa, you're getting twice as many antioxidants. The more, the merrier."

He also suggested opting for dark chocolate instead of milk if you don't find dark chocolate to be too bitter. "Don't consume milk chocolate if you can handle dark. The darker, the better, for the best effect on your health. Look at the label. Pick

It is believed that in the 17th century, lovers began exchanging mementos on Saint Valentine's Day, perhaps heeding the words of Shakespeare's Hamlet: "Sweets to the Sweet." Source: National Confectioners Association.



the least expensive bar with the highest percent of cocoa that you can handle." Once you make your selection, he advises not to binge eat, no matter how tempted you might be. "Take that 45-gram bar and break it in pieces. Eat it periodically throughout the day. It makes me full and then I don't want to snack." The good professor really does practice what he preaches; he had chocolate on his desk. Eat a small amount periodically throughout the day.

Last, but certainly not least, our chocolate expert left us with one of the happiest tidbits of information we may have ever heard: there is no evidence from supplementation studies that choco-

late causes weight gain. (Keep in mind: people in these studies aren't consuming multiple bars a day and the studies are short-term). Still, we find this reason to celebrate.

"Chocolate is a super snack," Dr. Vinson said, noting there is research to support it's beneficial to your heart and your brain. "So have some chocolate, and make sure it's dark."

To learn more about Dr. Vinson's studies, visit <http://academic.scranton.edu/faculty/vinson/>.

— julie imel

*Source: National Confectioners Association

The Beauty of Chocolate

Chocolate. It's a treat for your tastebuds, and for your skin. Today's beauty products include a host of chocolate and cocoa-scented scrubs, soaps, body washes and moisturizers. They smell wonderful, they feel great, and best of all, they're calorie-free. (For some great chocolate-inspired gifts for Valentine's Day, or any special occasion, check out Danielle & Company: <http://www.danielleandcompany.com/valentinesdaygifts.aspx>). Creating her own soap formulas for many years, Danielle Fleming shared her own special recipe for an easy DIY Chocolate Milk Bath:

Easy DIY Chocolate Milk Bath Ingredients:

¼ cup cocoa powder
1 cup powdered milk
½ cup Epsom salts
2 tablespoons baking soda
2 tablespoons corn starch

Directions:

In a medium size mixing bowl, mix the above ingredients. Store in an air-tight container until ready for use.

To use:

Add 2-4 tablespoons to running bath water. Soak in the luxurious silky water as it soothes and softens your skin.