



# Cacao's Wow Factor

Suppress your appetite while satisfying your sweet tooth...with chocolate! BY PEGGY HALL

**C**hocolate is probably not the first thing that comes to mind when you think about healthy, clean eating (though it may be on your mind when you're trying to diet!). The good news is that chocolate – and cacao, its natural counterpart – is considered by some to actually be a health food.

“Cacao, which is the seed of a South American tree fruit, contains no sugar and between 12 and 50 percent fat and oil, depending on variety and growth conditions,” says David Wolfe, a noted natural foods expert. “Cacao is actually one of the great weight-loss foods because it contains an abundance of minerals, such as magnesium, iron



## From Bean to Bar

**1.** Cacao beans are seeds from Forastero trees that are picked, dried and roasted.



**2.** The center of the bean, known as the cocoa nib, is removed and ground to form chocolate liquor.

**3.** The chocolate liquor is made into a paste. The cocoa butter is removed and then dried into a powder we know as cocoa.



**4.** Dark chocolate is made by combining the cocoa with sugar and vanilla. The higher the percentage of cocoa, the darker the chocolate. For clean eaters, 70% and more is recommended.



and chromium, that appear to shut off the appetite.”

Then why is it that most of us can't stop eating chocolate once we start? “The addictive properties in chocolate come from the sugar and fat that is added to most commercial chocolate – not from the cacao bean itself,” explains chocolate expert Patricia Tsai, owner of Chocovivo.

Cacao, cocoa, chocolate – what's the difference? Cacao is the raw bean (or seed) from the cacao tree. When cacao beans are dried, fermented and ground, they become what is called “chocolate liquor.” Cocoa is a powder that comes from separating out the cocoa butter from the chocolate liquor (that's why you can find fat-free cocoa powder sold in stores). Chocolate is made by blending together cocoa, cocoa butter and sugar.

Different manufacturers use different amounts of cocoa, cocoa butter and sugar to create their own special blends. For a chocolate to be considered dark, it must contain at least

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35 percent cocoa; milk chocolate has milk added to it, which adds additional fat and calories.

Unprocessed cacao beans, on the other hand, are considered to be a whole food and are prized by many as superior to good old-fashioned chocolate. “Cacao has been found to have about four times the beneficial procyanidin antioxidants found in regular roasted dark chocolate,” explains ethnobotanist Nat Bletter, PhD, of the New York Botanical Garden. Yet the pure cacao bean may be an acquired taste for some, since it contains no sugar and has a nutty, somewhat bitter flavor unless mixed with something like dried fruit or other sweeteners.

Cacao is known to be high in fatty acids, which are beneficial for your brain, heart and mood. As for the claim that cacao can help suppress the appetite? The US National Institutes of Health reports that Japanese researchers found that regular consumption of cocoa may prevent obesity and weight gain. Rats were fed high-fat diets, supplemented with real or imitation cocoa. After three weeks, the rats eating real cocoa had lower body weight and less fat tissue than those eating artificial cocoa. Researchers concluded that cocoa helps prevent fatty acid synthesis and also speeds fat burning in the liver. Of course, this does not serve as an excuse to be gluttonous. As with all foods, be judicious here too, especially since these were non-human studies.

Enjoy an ounce of dark chocolate or cacao nibs a few times a week or add a tablespoon of cocoa or cacao powder to your morning smoothie. Try Navitas Naturals for a variety of cacao products and check out our chocoholic recipe for No-Bake Chocolate Chip Cookies! ☺

## The Ultimate in Healthy Decadence

Made with 100 percent organic blue agave nectar, dark chocolate and natural fruit, “Saintly Sins” are the award-winning handmade chocolate collection created by Tracey Downey of Irvine, California-based Xan Confections. These treasures are low glycemic, gluten free and vegan and contain only 29 calories, 1 gram of fat and 8 grams of sugar per delicious piece. The “Jewel” collection chocolates are vegan, agave-based caramels with no refined sugar – clocking in at 55 calories, 3 grams of fat and 6 grams of sugar per piece.



A chocolate chip cookie you don't have to bake? Yes, it's true!

## No-Bake Chocolate Chip Cookies

Makes 42 cookies.

Gluten free, dairy free and fat free, these cookies need no baking!

### INGREDIENTS:

- 1¼ cup raisins
- ½ cup pitted Deglet Noor dates
- 2 cups whole oats
- 4 tbs agave or honey
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- Pinch of salt, to taste
- ½ cup cacao nibs

### INSTRUCTIONS:

**ONE:** Place raisins and dates in your food processor and chop into small pieces. Add oats, agave or honey, cinnamon and salt. Process to mix well. Empty into a mixing bowl and add cacao nibs. Mix well.

**TWO:** Use a tablespoon measure to portion cookies. Enjoy immediately, or chill before serving for firmer texture.

**Nutrients per 2 cookies:** Calories: 140, Total Fat: 3 g, Sat. Fat: 1.5 g, Carbs: 26 g, Fiber: 3 g, Sugars: 7 g, Protein: 3 g, Sodium: 15 mg, Cholesterol: 0 mg