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## **Dark Chocolate and Hot Cocoa Sweeten People's Way towards Lower Heart Attack Risk**

*Cocoa-based candy and drinks reduce blood platelets' tendency towards clotting and cut risk of heart risk deaths when consumed moderately*

A recent study showed that eating a few tablets of chocolate - dark chocolate, if possible - and drinking a cup of hot cocoa on a regular basis brings 'sweet' health to individuals independent of age, gender or race, as they may play a crucial role in reducing heart attack death risk. Researchers at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine explained that a moderate intake of dark chocolate or hot cocoa curbs risk of heart attack by cutting the formation of clots in narrow blood vessels. However, the team warned that people should not start eating as much chocolate as they can or want to, especially chocolate or candy bars with large amounts of sugar, butter and cream added. Instead, they should stick to a few tablets of dark, cocoa-based chocolate and hot chocolate drink once a day. Diane Becker, M.P.H., Sc.D., Professor at The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and Bloomberg School of Public Health stated that the beneficial effect that chocolate has on human health is mainly given by a chemical naturally occurring in cocoa, which reduces the tendency of platelets in blood vessels to clot and lead to thicker, narrower, less flexible vessels: "What these chocolate 'offenders' taught us is that the chemical in cocoa beans has a biochemical effect similar to aspirin in reducing platelet clumping, which can be fatal if a clot forms and blocks a blood vessel, causing a heart attack." Platelets are one of the main components of blood, which tend to stick together and form blood clots. For instance, when an injury occurs, blood platelets seal up the injured area and prevent excessive hemorrhage in that region, speeding the lesion's healing. Taking into account the fact that cocoa's natural compound may have the potency of preventing platelets from excessive clotting and therefore cuts risk of heart attack or stroke, medical experts recommend individuals to eat a few tablets of plain dark chocolate - no sugar, cream or other synthesizers added, if possible - on a regular basis. Cocoa - based drinks, such as hot cocoa may also help keeping risk of blood clots and heart attack event at bay. Professor Becker said: "Eating a little bit of chocolate or having a drink of hot cocoa as part of a regular diet is probably good for personal health, so long as people don't eat too much of it, and too much of the kind with lots of butter and sugar." Commenting on the results of the Johns Hopkins study which have been presented at the American Heart Association's annual Scientific Sessions held in Chicago, study co-author Nauder Faraday, M.D. cautioned that the beneficial effects of cocoa-based candy and drink do not work on their own. They must be combined with a healthy diet and physical exercise: "These results really bring home the point that a modest dietary practice can have a huge impact on blood and potentially on the health of people at a mildly elevated risk of heart disease. But we have to be careful to emphasize that one single healthy dietary practice cannot be taken alone, but must be balanced with exercise and other healthy lifestyle practices that impact the heart."