

## DARK CHOCOLATE IS GOOD FOR YOU

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LONDON • It is food news guaranteed to put a smile on your face. Scientists have found that eating dark chocolate lowers the risk of depression fourfold after eating it.

While 7.6 per cent of the 13,000 people surveyed reported depressive symptoms, just 1.5 per cent of the chocolate eaters did.

The study carried out by University College London (UCL) also found that the people who consumed the most of any chocolate — between 3.6oz (104g) and 16oz (454g) — were also 57 per cent less likely to report depressive symptoms.

Dr. Sarah Jackson, the lead author from UCL'S Institute of Epidemiology and Healthcare, said: "This study provides some evidence that consumption of chocolate, particularly dark chocolate, may be associated with reduced odds of clinically relevant depressive symptoms.

"However, further research is required to clarify the direction of causation. It could be the case that depression causes people to lose their interest in eating chocolate, or there could be other factors that make people both less likely to eat dark chocolate and to be depressed."

The study is the first to examine the association between depression and the type of chocolate consumed.

UCL, with the University of Calgary and Alberta Health Services Canada, assessed data from 13,626 adults. After adjusting for

such factors as height, weight and physical activity, it found that individuals who reported eating dark chocolate in two 24-hour periods had 70 per cent lower odds of reporting clinically relevant depressive symptoms than those who reported not eating chocolate at all.

British scientists urged caution about the findings, suggesting that, for example, people who ate dark chocolate may be more health conscious in general. Depressed people are also more likely to crave more sugary fatty foods and so could be less likely to pick a dark alternative when choosing chocolate.

Anthony Cleare, professor of psychopharmacology and affective disorders at King's College London, said: "Although there is an association between lower rates of depression and higher intake of dark chocolate, the main problem with the study is that it cannot tell us whether it is the dark chocolate is protecting against depression or whether it is depression affecting the consumption of dark chocolate.

"We know that depression has marked effects on overall appetite and on the type of foods people crave, and it is just as plausible that the direction of causation is the reverse to the authors' interpretation."

The research was published in the journal *Depression and Anxiety*.