

Chocolate is Good for You, but Buyer Beware

by Steve Meyerowitz, “Sproutman”

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Are you familiar with Green and Black? They are the leading British chocolate maker in the organic sector and they are quite successful. Last year the company increased their sales by 69%. (Imagine if you got a raise in salary by that much!) They grossed a healthy 41 million dollars. One of their lead products is a 70 percent cocoa 100 gram bar that is popular with health-conscious consumers. Pure chocolate, without the milk and sugar and the pesticides, contains many antioxidants and flavonols, which have numerous health benefits (see below).

Evidently, Cadbury Schweppes found them delectable, too. The London based company, which manufactures Europe’s best selling *Dairy Milk* brand, just acquired them for an undisclosed sum. Previously, they had owned a 5% stake in Green and Black. The good news is that Green and Black will continue to operate independently and be able to maintain its ethical values. Green and Black was the first UK company to source its cocoa beans under Fair Trade agreements and its Mayan Gold chocolate was the first organic chocolate product to be awarded the Fair Trade Mark in 1994.

More and more information is coming forth about the health benefits of chocolate. It turns out that cocoa actually contains antioxidants and many different types of flavonols, such as quercetin and rutin, which belong to the larger family of bioflavonoids. Flavonols are famous for their protective properties against cardiovascular disease, but they also have numerous benefits to the immune system, reduce inflammation and increase blood flow to all sorts of important places including the brain.

Buyer Beware

This is good news especially if you buy organic chocolate and avoid the milk and sugar and buy from brands like *Green and Black*. But beware as other manufacturers try to enter the market to take advantage of this good health news. You see, candy manufacturers have been on the receiving end of a lot of negative criticism for their role in the obesity epidemic and everything else from cavities to diabetes. They see the health benefits of chocolate as a way of improving their unhealthy image.

For example, Mars, the giant confectionary company, wants to synthesize the flavonols and turn them into drugs that can be marketed in their candy bars. “*We have been able to identify the molecular structure of flavonols found in natureBut we are also able to synthesize not only those found in nature but also compounds tailored to specific needs,*” says Marlene Machut, communications director for Mars Nutrition. She says they are in “*serious discussions with large pharmaceutical companies*” for a licensing or joint venture agreement that could see some flavonols extracted from its chocolate developed as prescription drugs.

The problem is that chocolate contains these benefits naturally and that all chocolate companies can claim health benefits. But companies like Mars seek to carve out a unique position in the marketplace by synthesizing and patenting these antioxidants for commercial use.

So, enjoy your chocolate, but choose wisely about from whom and what kind you buy.

For more information, read *THE ORGANIC FOOD GUIDE. How to Shop Smarter and Eat Healthier*. By Steve Meyerowitz or visit <http://www.sproutman.com/organic.html>