The Truth About Chocolate

I am not sure what the Adventist Church teaches about chocolate consumption. I hear some say it is good, and others that Ellen White said we shouldn’t eat it. Can you shed light on this for me?

What Ellen White wrote is often different from what people think or report she wrote.

Actually, we have not found anything mentioned about chocolate by Mrs. White, so we doubt very much that she was concerned about it—particularly as an examination of her grocery lists (the ones available) shows she purchased chocolate.

Much of the debate comes from repeated assertions that chocolate contains caffeine. In fact, the caffeine content is in no way comparable to that in tea, coffee, or caffeinated beverages, being of a magnitude of one-tenth to one-fifteenth as much. Some of the factors in chocolate may actually be very healthful.

The problem is that, to date, studies on chocolate have been small in size and—consequently—less capable of solving the issue. Of course, if a person already has an opinion they wish to promote, they often give more credence to such studies. We frequently see that, especially in situations in which a person looks for studies to buttress an opinion they already hold.

We recommend fruits and vegetables for their phytochemicals and, in particular, their polyphenols, which are thought to play a role in lowering blood pressure.

Apart from fruits and vegetables, dark chocolate (not white or milk chocolate) is a major contributor to the population’s total polyphenol intake. Cocoa contains these polyphenols, which are most concentrated in cocoa syrup.

Chocolate is rich in sugar and fat, and regular consumption of large amounts will contribute to problems with obesity.

The polyphenols in dark chocolate are called flavanols, which are felt to influence blood pressure.

Several small studies have shown benefits of consuming 100-gram doses of dark chocolate to lessen cardiovascular risk. A recent study, however, looked at one piece of chocolate a day (i.e., 6.3 grams of dark chocolate), and compared it with white chocolate. No noted weight gain was experienced in this study, yet the dark chocolate...
group showed a reduction in blood pressure. The study was small and far from definitive, but it suggested the mechanism may be through an effect on the lining of the blood vessels—the endothelium. A nitric oxide cycle is involved in blood pressure regulation, and it is postulated that small doses of chocolate may favorably influence this pathway.

Adventist Church members, fortunately, focus more on biblical theology than chocolate confectionary.

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While this column is provided as a service to our readers, Drs. Landless and Handysides unfortunately cannot enter into personal and private communication with our readers. We recommend that you consult with your personal physician on all matters of your health.