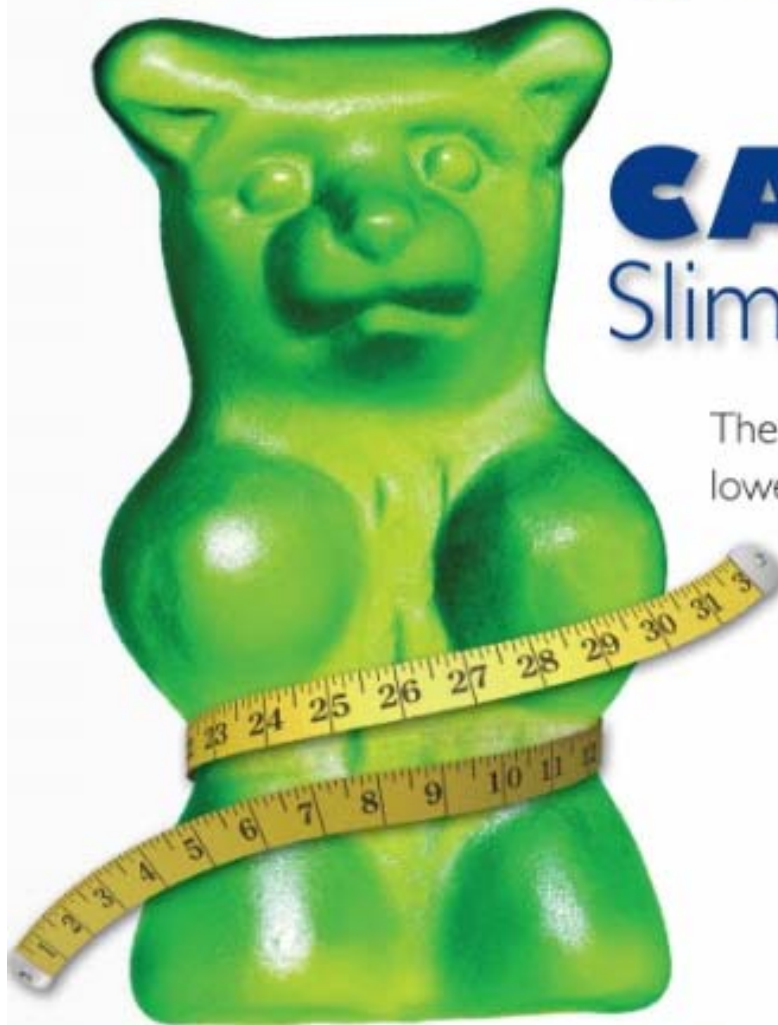


Professional Candy Buyer
July/August 2010
“Healthy Chocolate” by Holly Case

JULY / AUGUST 2010

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EASTER 2011 PREVIEW



Healthy Chocolate

Antioxidants, omega-3s and probiotics boost cacao's benefits

By Holly Case

SINCE ITS DISCOVERY MORE THAN 500 YEARS AGO, PEOPLE HAVE loved to indulge in chocolate. Even its official name—*Theobroma cacao*—means “food of the gods.” Favorite forms of chocolate vary by time and location, but it remains a favorite treat for people of almost all cultures.

Even though many health-conscious consumers avoid potato chips and ice cream, chocolate is one vice few give up entirely. Chocoholics have rejoiced in recent years as studies have given chocolate a “health halo,” finding healthy qualities in chocolate that let them consume it with less guilt. Companies looking to cash in on the overall health and wellness trend have found chocolate an ideal vehicle for adding healthy supplements.

A Growing Market

While the overall chocolate category is experiencing slower sales, premium chocolate remains the bright exception, according to “U.S. Chocolate and Seasonal Chocolate Confectionery,” a Mintel report released in July 2007. Chocolate with extra ingredients is bringing in new buyers, the report shows.

“Dark chocolate (up 49 percent in current terms and 36 percent in constant terms between 2003 and 2006) and premium chocolate (up 91 percent in current terms between 2002 and 2007) are the darlings of the chocolate world. But, their soaring sales have not been enough to boost category sales over the rate of inflation,” the report states.

“Chocolate bar players will want to take back snack time from nutrition and energy bars, a category that has increased sales 35 percent in current terms between 2001 and 2006. To do so, chocolate makers may want to fortify their products with vitamins and/or point out to consumers that chocolate bars are often the same amount of calories as energy bars, plus a lot more satisfying.”

Functional chocolate—the term for products containing wellness ingredients and supplements—is an acceptable indulgence for consumers looking for treats that do double duty by satisfying sweet cravings and boosting health, too.

Health Benefits Abound

Rarely do people associate healthy foods with those that taste good, but chocolate is one happy exception.

A study published in the *Journal of Nutrition* reported that dark chocolate had beneficial effects on levels of C-reactive protein, a marker of inflammation in the blood and strong indicator of heart disease. Researchers found even small amounts of dark chocolate—the equivalent of one regular Hershey bar a week—are enough to reduce the risk of stroke and heart attack. While dark chocolate is less popular in America than in Europe, milk chocolate contains some of the same health benefits, though in smaller amounts.

Chocolate also naturally contains antioxidants, which can reduce the effects of heart-damaging and cancer-promoting free radicals that occur in the body as part of the aging process. ORAC, or oxygen radical absorbance capacity, is one measurement that indicates the total level of antioxidants in a food. Studies have found that both dark and milk chocolate contain ORAC levels much higher than even “superfoods” like berries, which also have very high levels of antioxidants.

Tracey Downey of **Xan Confections** thinks the antioxidants in chocolate can make it a healthy indulgence. “People can start to view chocolate as being healthy by educating consumers about chocolate’s health aspects—the media has played a predominant role in the past few years reporting on the antioxidant qualities in chocolate and how these antioxidants benefit a person’s health, including an improved mood and reduced blood pressure.”

Nutrition Addition

When nature doesn’t deliver, vendors are stepping in, enhancing chocolate products with omega-3 fatty acids and probiotics.

Omega-3 fatty acids, found most commonly in fish oil and flax oil, are known for boosting brain and heart health. Experts believe they work by reducing inflammation, which also makes them a good choice now that anti-inflammatory pain relievers like ibuprofen are linked to possible heart problems. But except for diners eating



diets high in fish, few Americans get adequate amounts of omega-3s. That's where new chocolate formulations come into play.

Marmor Chocolates makes a line of heart-healthy chocolate with added omega-3s from fish oil. The company's chocolate bars, with 40 milligrams of omega-3s in each chocolate square, can be found in 5,000 **Walgreens** stores and in **Whole Foods Market** stores in the mid-Atlantic region. "If you have a snack at work, for example, you can have high-quality, 70 percent dark cocoa and get a quarter of the omega-3s you need in a day," Barry Gasaway, Marmor's vice president of sales, says.

The most obvious question: How does it taste? Not fishy! "Our fish oil is double-encapsulated," says Gasaway. "Imagine powder inside a ping-pong ball, which is then inside a basketball. It is not detectable."

Chocolate is an ideal delivery system for supplements because they bind well to the cocoa butter and are well absorbed in the blood stream after it reaches the stomach, Gasaway adds.

And then there are probiotics, which typically bring yogurt to mind.

Unfortunately, most consumers do not consume enough yogurt to get the probiotics' health-enhancing effects. Luckily, other products are filling the void. Famed chocolatier **Barry Callebaut** launched what is believed to be the world's first probiotic chocolate produced on industrial scale at the Food Ingredients Europe 2007 trade fair in London. According to the Packaged Facts report "Boosting Immunity Through Digestion: The Relation Among Probiotics, Prebiotics and Digestive Enzymes," the global retail market for probiotic/prebiotic foods and beverages was \$15 billion in 2008, a 13 percent increase over 2007.

The reason for the growing awareness of probiotics is clear: consumers need the digestive benefits provided by the good bacteria. Half of all Americans experience digestive distress daily, and adults between the ages of 35 to 64 are the typical consumers of probiotics. High-sugar diets can disrupt the balance of good bacteria in the digestive systems, but probiotics can add more positive bacteria back into our bodies.

Companies like **Attune Foods** have found a way to get Americans to consume more probiotics by combining the supplement with chocolate bars. "We know that chocolate has penetrated 95 percent of U.S. households, so this seemed like a logical choice for probiotics," Attune CEO Rob Hurlbut says.

Hurlbut also believes there is room for growth in the probiotic field. "Women are the most common buyers of probiotic products, and all people are more likely to experience digestive distress more frequently as they age," he says. "Probiotics are really one of many important aspects of nutrition. People are starting to learn more about how the gut works and how important it is to health, so we need to get probiotics into the



right channels." Chocolate is one of them.

Education and marketing are key to reaching more buyers for probiotic-enhanced products. Travelers frequently confront digestive troubles, so marketing products for on-the-go shoppers is one approach to reaching customers in need. "We need to spend a lot of

energy promoting probiotics through social media, public relations and working with retailers," Hurlbut says. He suggests creating centralized in-store displays so customers can find all of in-stock probiotic products in one place.

Gasaway, whose company also makes probiotic-enhanced chocolate, agrees the market for probiotics is important. "Of all the healthy chocolates, [those with] probiotics are probably the most important because of the sugar content in our diets, the role of probiotics in our immune system and the fact of how hard it is to store good bacteria in our bodies."

Next Up

While the market remains sluggish for other treats, industry pros expect consumers to continue relying on functional chocolate to play a dual role—indulgent treat and health supplement.

"The next wave coming out is calcium and vitamin D3," Gasaway reports. "That is what is really needed in our diets, and supplementation in chocolate form works so well. Consumers don't have to develop a taste for a new product; it is better to add the supplements to the foods they already eat and love."

In addition to calcium and vitamin D, fiber is another emerging trend in functional chocolate. Many functional chocolate buyers also prefer products that use alternative sweeteners such as agave syrup or stevia.

Gasaway also has advice for manufacturers looking to create new supplement-enriched products. "The key to making a successful product with added supplements is to ask yourself three questions: Does it taste good? Is the texture good? And is the mouth-feel good? We had to work hard and make several attempts to get these right."

In the end, functional chocolate is an idea that just makes sense. "It's easy to forget to take a supplement every day," Gasaway says, "but if you can choose a product you would normally eat anyway that contains the supplement, why wouldn't you?" **PCB**

