

Chocolate's effect on women's sex drive



The Core Assessment topic that I chose was "Chocolate's Effect on Women's Sex Drive." I thought this to be an important topic since I am a man who is married to a woman who loves chocolate and that I have always heard that chocolate tends to curb a woman's sex drive. In an effort to find the truth, and possibly rid my household of any form of chocolate, I researched the topic and found that chocolate has an interesting history and does indeed contain many chemicals that are found to provide a settling or euphoric state in the brain.

Chocolate is a derivative of cocoa or cacao (pronounced "co-cah") and can only be grown in hot, rainy environments, mostly in areas near the equator. This doesn't mean that you have to live near the equator to grow cocoa trees, but it is helpful. Cocoa is such a delicate and sensitive crop, that a grower must look after the trees, making sure the trees are protected from the wind and sun. Cacao seedlings are often sheltered by other trees, like banana, plantain, coconuts or hardwood trees. Seedlings take a few months to grow before they are ready to be transplanted.

Once the trees are established, a grower must fertilize the soil and watch the trees closely for signs of distress. Most cocoa trees begin to bear fruit in the fifth year, although some cocoa trees can yield pods in the third and fourth years. A cocoa tree reaches peak production in approximately 10 years and will continue producing pods at a high level for an additional 12-13 years. It is not uncommon to find trees 30 to 40 years old, still producing pods. A single pod from the cocoa tree can contain up to 50 cocoa beans (www. icco.org).

With such a labor intensive process, it is any wonder why chocolate isn't more expensive...I am glad because my wife would make us chocolate poor! From the time the first cocoa beans were harvested by the Mayans, there has been the belief that chocolate has a euphoric impact on the body's senses. The conquistadores saw the Emperor Montezuma of the Aztecs consuming a large quantity of cocoa in the form of a beverage called chocolatl before entering his harem. The invading Spaniards spread the Emperor's belief that cocoa was an aphrodisiac and brought it to Europe.

If chocolate does, in fact, suppress the sex drive in women, this could be considered Montezuma's Revenge on the rest of the world.. and not the kind you get from drinking the water in Mexico. The belief that chocolate is an aphrodisiac was also shared by one of history's most famous lovers, Giacomo Casanova. Casanova was thought to have used chocolate to lure women into his bed. It was even rumored that he lured attractive nuns with chocolate, but that has never been substantiated as no one has ever seen an attractive nun. Since then, the use of chocolate as part of the mating ritual has been firmly established.

More recently it has been shown that not only does chocolate increase the sexual appetite but also produces a sense of elation similar to an orgasm. As you can probably tell, the complete removal of chocolate from my household is becoming closer than ever and my wife will not consider me to be her Casanova! It has only been in recent times that scientists have unraveled chocolate's psychotropic properties and the effects it has on us. Chocolate has been found to contain modest amounts of the stimulant Theo-bromine, or caffeine, but much less than in coffee or tea.

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The Hershey's Chocolate company website indicates " Due to its natural occurrence in cocoa beans, Theo-bromine is also a component of all chocolate products, though the amount will vary depending on how much and which ingredients are used. Dark chocolates, unsweetened baking chocolate, and cocoa powder contain more Theo-bromine than milk chocolates and chocolate syrups. For example, a 1.55 ounce (43 g) HERSHEY'S milk chocolate bar contains about 64 mg of Theo-bromine. In comparison, the same weight of HERSHEY'S SPECIAL DARK Mildly Sweet Chocolate contains about 188 mg of Theo-bromine (www.hehersheycompany.com). Chocolate's levels of caffeine, while not that of coffee or tea, can increase alertness to a degree. Chocolate is also known to generate increased levels of serotonin, a chemical naturally produced by the brain, which is known to reduce anxiety. According to researchers at the Mayo Clinic, " as a neurotransmitter, serotonin helps to relay messages from one area of the brain to another. Because of the widespread distribution of its cells, it is believed to influence a variety of psychological and other body functions.

Of the approximately 40 million brain cells, most are influenced either directly or indirectly by serotonin. This includes brain cells related to mood, sexual desire and function, appetite, sleep, memory and learning, temperature regulation, and some social behavior" (www.mayoclinic.com). Serotonin is most commonly associated with the effects of marijuana or getting "stoned" However, you would have to eat 25lbs of dark chocolate at once to achieve the same effect, but this would take care of the "munchies!" Neither of these properties by themselves provides the connection

between eating chocolates and heightened sexual pleasure. It is in fact the rush of endorphins produced by eating chocolates, particularly dark chocolates, which is most similar to the bliss associated with a healthy sexual relationship. Chocolate can affect the brain by causing the release of certain neurotransmitters. Neurotransmitters are the molecules that transmit signals between neurons. The amounts of neurotransmitters we have at any given time can have a great impact on our mood. Happy neurotransmitters such as endorphins and other opiates can help to reduce stress and lead to feelings of euphoria.

As connections between neurons, they are released from the pre-synaptic membrane and travel across the synaptic cleft to react with receptors in the post-synaptic membrane. " Receptors are specified to react with particular molecules which can trigger different responses in the connected neurons. The proper neurotransmitter can trigger certain emotions" (webspace. ship. edu). Chocolate also contains phenyl-ethylamine which is known to stimulate the release of dopamine into the pleasure centers commonly associated with an orgasm (departments. weber. edu).

In addition to this scientific evidence, a great deal of behavioral research has been done to study the sexual behavior of women who eat a lot of chocolate and those who don't. The conclusion of this is that women who consume large quantities of chocolate have more satisfying sex lives. However, it could be assumed that women with satisfying sex lives tend to eat more chocolate. Interview conducted on Subject A: Subject A, Dana Reid, is a 34 year old female. She has been married for 12 years and has one child. She and her husband work and try to find time for intimacy.

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Subject A works as a part time dental assistant and her husband is a full time Army National Guardsman. Subject A reports that she and her husband have an excellent marriage, with a healthy sex life, and that she is happy in her relationship with her husband. Subject A does think about sex , but it is not often. She also is very happy as a mother and reports that spending time with her child gives her a feeling of being needed and wanted. Subject A finds chocolate to be a definite must in her house. She says that it is a comfort food and has at least one to two pieces every night. She also makes brownies on occasion and loves them as well.

She had never given any thought as to how or if chocolate would decrease her sex drive. Subject A says that she feels calmer after eating chocolate and seems to drift off to sleep easier. She has eaten chocolate before and after sex and says it doesn't seem to sway her sexual appetite. Interview conducted on Subject B: Subject B, Carla Barrieau, is a 42 year old female. She is divorced and has two children from her previous marriage. She is not currently in a relationship and says she has no intention to pursue a serious relationship at this point in her life. Subject B is a postal worker and works an average of 50-60 per week.

She has a lot of stress as she is a single mom raising two kids and carrying the full financial burden of the household. She has not had sex since her divorce over two years ago, but she does think about frequently. Subject B has a close relationship with her two children who still live her. Subject B describes herself as a chocoholic. She buys chocolate all the time and finds it to be a comfort food like Subject A. Subject B does eat more chocolate than Subject A. Subject B has heard that chocolate releases the same chemicals

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that are found to be released during sex, but doesn't think it would diminish the sex drive in women.

She does find that chocolate seems to make her feel at ease and makes her stress level go down, but feels that it may be a placebo effect and mental dependency rather than a physical dependency. Chocolate seems to have an effect on the brain. This is due to the many compounds and chemicals that can be found in chocolate. A few of these are:

- Tryptophan and serotonin: They create feelings of relaxation and well-being.
- Caffeine: Creates temporary alertness.
- Xanthenes: This mild stimulant occurs naturally in the brain and, like caffeine, increases wakefulness.
- Theo bromine: This stimulant and vasodilator increases blood flow.
- Phenyl Ethylamine: This compound stimulates the brain to release dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with feelings of pleasure (orgasm) and motivation.
- Anandamide: This neurotransmitter activates pleasure receptors in the brain.
- Flavonols: Found also in foods like red wine, blueberries and green tea, these compounds boost blood flow to key areas of the brain for two to three hours after being metabolized, basically having the same effect as aspirin.

The interviews that were conducted took place inside a International Plaza Mall food court.

They interviewees were very leery of giving the interview, but seemed to become more comfortable with the promise of anonymity. Subject A seemed, at least by appearance and the way she spoke of her life, to have a carefree existence. She worked only because she needed money to shop. Her husband is a Colonel at the Army National Guard base and makes quite a bit of money. Her child is often with the grandmother and her house is cleaned by a maid. Subject A's house is in a prestigious neighborhood. Subject A's life

is almost worry free. Subject B is the sole bread-winner and constantly works to pay her bills and provide a life for her children.

One of her children is old enough to baby sit the other, but this still worries Subject B as her children are home for some time before she gets home.

Subject B lives in a rental home in a working class neighborhood. She is heavily burdened and doesn't have much time to herself. The day I performed the interview was the first day she had to herself for quite some time. Subject B's life is a struggle to survive. After conducting all of my research, reading through various articles and studies, and conducting the interviews; I have found that chocolate does have an effect on the brain.

Chocolate releases many chemicals that are released during sex. These are the same chemicals that are found in other foods but, are more like "one stop shopping" with chocolate. Chocolate has a wonderful taste and can be found cheaply at any store, anywhere in world. However, it is my belief that it is life in general and a person's desire, not chocolate, that either creates or suppresses a woman's sex drive. Whereas chocolate may contain some of the same chemicals that are released during sex, it does not suppress the sex drive in women.

Despite what science says, a woman's stress level, work load and personal sexual desire are what controls her urges for sex. The chemicals in chocolate may send the same waves and fire the synapses as sex but, nothing in chemical form could take the place of sexual intercourse and the effects that physical touch and pleasure can release. Works Cited: Barrieau, Carla. (2011, February 18). Postal Worker, Tampa Florida. Interview Bird, James A, Ph. D. ,

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