

July 2014

# Sowkhya

Magazine™

## Chocolate

**A Healthy Treat or Risky Habit?**

## A Weight Loss Story

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## Message from the Editor

Hello readers, and welcome to our July version of Sowkhya Magazine™. As always, I hope you are well and in great spirits!

This month's edition is a really light hearted one, full of things that we love like chocolate and coffee. Sprinkled in between is a story of a patient of ours, who has been on a remarkable journey of weight loss, and who I believe must be an inspiration to all of us looking to lead a healthier life. Of course, I understand the irony of talking about chocolate on one page, and weight loss on the other, but I am hoping you will see the 'healthier' side of chocolate rather than the over-indulgence aspect of it. Read along and take a look at what we have offered this month and I am sure you will love the information we have for you.

I have always believed that people can stay healthy and live long despite their sweet tooth and comfort foods. All that is needed is determination to stay fit and to exercise regularly. I hope this edition give you that inspiration and courage to start your journey! I look forward to joining you on this, and wish you all the very best!! Here is to your good health!



**Dr B G Baliga**  
MD FRCP FICC  
Editor, Sowkhya Magazine™

## Chocolate – Worthy Indulgence or Bad Addiction?

We all love chocolate. It is the one pleasure in life that can offer the saddest souls comfort and the darkest day some light. Since the time chocolate has been in existence, it has been melted, tempered, shaped and filled with 'heavenly goodness' – nuts, caramel, strawberry jelly – you name it, it's probably in there!

Now that we have your mouths watering, it may be a good idea to know whether eating chocolate can actually be good for you, or whether it is one terrible addiction to have. But first, let's look at the history of chocolate a little.

### The origins

Chocolate was first made from the roasted, ground beans of the *Theobroma cacao*, and the origins date back to 1900BC in Mesoamerica. At some point in time, they were used as currency by the Aztecs! Unfortunately the people back then did not have the creativity (and possibly the machinery) to shape and mould chocolate in its currently available delicious forms, and in fact tended to serve it up as a bitter drink. It should therefore come as no surprise that the word 'chocolate' probably originates from the classical Nahuatl word 'xocolātl' that means 'bitter water'.

### The bright side - health benefits

In India, and in the rest of the world, we have available two different kinds of chocolate – milk chocolate and dark chocolate. The former contains added milk fats and solids, while the latter tends to contain more cocoa and chocolately goodness. A recent study demonstrated that regular consumption of a small amount of dark chocolate can improve circulation in the blood vessels in the periphery of the body. The mechanism is believed to be related to the presence of compounds in dark chocolate called 'polyphenols' that can improve blood flow within the arteries.

In addition to this, chocolate is also rich in 'flavonoids' – a compound that has a powerful antioxidant effect and can protect the cells in the body from damage by toxic free radical molecules. But again, this is higher in dark chocolate, as it contains a higher proportion of non-fat cocoa solids as compared to milk chocolate. Cocoa itself has some saturated fat within it, but this is composed of stearic acid and tends not to elevate cholesterol levels that much. If you read the label on any chocolate product, it contains 'cocoa butter'. Fear not! This is high in mono-unsaturated fats, which is good for health. Of course, milk chocolate has milk fats, which are not good in any way.

So what are the benefits? Well, firstly, some researchers have shown that regular consumption of a few squares of dark chocolate can reduce the chance of dying from a heart attack. It could possibly reduce blood pressure and decrease LDL cholesterol levels. Increased sensitivity to insulin has been reported, as has an increase in blood flow through blood vessels. Moderate amount of dark chocolate consumption every week can help reduce the chance of developing stroke in men.

Patients with long term fatigue (chronic fatigue syndrome) can also benefit, it has been reported. And finally, it can improve a person's mood by enhancing the action of neurotransmitter hormones like serotonin in the brain (making chocolate the ideal solution for an angry relative!).

### The dark side – addiction and health risks

It is stated that 'not all chocolate is created equal', and certainly this is the case between milk and dark chocolate as we have seen. Regular consumption of milk chocolate can increase blood sugar levels and body weight. It is not to be consumed by diabetic patients. It can become the 'go-to comfort food', making it addicting as well.

Chocolate can be good for you in small amounts, and dark chocolate is the best choice. It won't be long before doctors start prescribing a few squares of dark chocolate a day to keep you healthy. But remember – smoking, a poor diet and lack of exercise can offset the benefits of dark chocolate, and the combination can be a cardiovascular disaster. Instead, be 'treatwise' and enjoy some dark chocolate today!



## Coffee – Your Morning Cup of Joy!



Admit it – some mornings are rough! You wake up in the morning still tired, hoping you could get a few more minutes of sleep before you head off to your busy job through heavy traffic.

Enter your morning cup of coffee - that strong brew that can brighten up the gloomiest and laziest of days. Myth has it that goats in Ethiopia in 850 AD were unusually sprightly after eating the red berries of the coffee plant. Current estimates of coffee consumption are staggering, with an estimated 400 billion cups of coffee consumed every day!

Coffee consumption brings with it plenty of benefits, and a handful of risks. In particular, it is believed that consumed moderate amounts of coffee on a regular basis can reduce the chances of developing type 2 diabetes, Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease. It is rich in anti-oxidant compounds that fight off toxic free radicals that can damage cells and cause heart disease and premature ageing.

But beware – adding cream and sugar to coffee can offset its benefits, and as always, too much of a good thing can be a bad thing. Drinking too much coffee can increase blood pressure, though a recent Harvard University study showed no increased risk of death from cancer or cardiovascular disease from high consumption (6 cups or more). Home brews are best, as the added ingredients that you would get in a coffee house coffee are absent. Avoid caffeinated drinks if you are pregnant (though the jury is still out on this one). Go ahead – enjoy your morning cup of coffee and lead a healthy life for years to come!

## Understanding Vitiligo

Our skin is subject to different stresses and clinical conditions. One such condition is vitiligo. You may have noticed a friend or a family member who has a few 'pale patches' or 'white patches' on their skin. This is what vitiligo is, and here we shall take a look at this condition in a little more detail.

### What is Vitiligo?

Vitiligo is a pigmentary disorder of the skin where small, well demarcated areas of the skin lose their natural colour and become white. They can start off as small areas that can grow over a period of time. Typically patients with vitiligo also suffer from other clinical conditions such as thyroid disease, though this may not necessarily be the case.



### What causes it?

Well, there are a number of theories behind why vitiligo develops. One possibility is damage to the skin pigment cells called melanocytes. This could be precipitated through alterations in the anti-oxidant system within the body, allowing for skin damage through free radicals and oxidative stress. Certain genetic factors can also play a role in the pathogenesis.

### Treatment

Vitiligo is a difficult condition to treat. Phototherapy, which involves exposure of the skin to different wavelengths of light, has been used with reasonable success. Ultraviolet rays are the commonly used wavelength. Certain types of chemotherapy such as psoralen have also been used, and are often combined with ultraviolet light therapy. Laser therapy and steroid creams can be used, but must be done so under caution. Vitamin D enriched creams are useful in altering the immune response of melanocytes, and can prolong their life. However, most of these therapies are only partly successful, and many a times patients will still have evidence of the disease despite treatment.

\*\*\*picture courtesy Wikipedia.org

## Hepatitis – Troublesome Liver Disease

The liver is a vital organ within us that is responsible for getting rid of harmful toxins and generating different factors that helps maintain normal homeostasis. But once in a while, it can get affected by viruses, resulting in a condition called hepatitis. Clinically, there are 5 different types of hepatitis – Hepatitis A, B, C, D and E. Hepatitis A is the most common type of infection, while hepatitis B and C are considered to be the most worrying kind. Here, we talk a little bit about hepatitis A infection.

### Key points

Without going into too many details about the virus and the illness itself, it may be interesting to know that hepatitis A virus spreads through the consumption of contaminated water. Furthermore, contact with a person who is currently suffering from a bout of hepatitis A can spread the virus (this risk disappears once the symptoms settle down). Hepatitis A vaccines are available (as are hepatitis B vaccines) that can prevent infections and spread. Patients typically present with diarrhoea and fever, along with mild abdominal pain and possibly jaundice.

As such there is no specific treatment for the condition, and supportive treatment is the best option. Patients should consume good amounts of water and maintain adequate nutrition during the infective stage.

Prevention is better than cure, and preventing hepatitis A can be simple. Avoid eating food from street vendors, and always drink filtered or bottled water. Maintain good sanitation and hygiene (hand washing etc.), and hepatitis A will be very unlikely to affect you.

## An Inspiration to Us All!!

One of the most common complaints we hear from our patients is their difficulty in losing weight despite their best efforts. While we understand and appreciate that weight loss is hard, it is not impossible. It takes hard work and dedication, and tremendous amount of patience. This fact is epitomised in the success of one of our patients, Mr Shodhan Kumar, who through a self-planned diet and exercise regime managed to lose an astounding amount of weight in a matter of months. We thought we would get his perspective on the whole 'weight loss is impossible' issue.

**SM: Congratulations on your amazing weight loss! How are you feeling?**

**SK:** As you know when I visited Dr Baliga for the first time in the month of November 2013, I weighed 124 Kg, and my waist measured 44 inches. Last week I weighed 99 Kg and my waist measured 36 inches! This was my size and weight in 1992 and I had put on a lot of weight until 2013, as you can see in my picture to the right. With my weight loss, I now feel as young as I did in 1992!



**SM: Tell us a little bit about you and your weight loss journey? What is it that inspired you to make a start? Did you succeed from the very beginning?**

**SK:** This is the difference between health and wealth. It is very easy to gain weight and very difficult to lose. I had gone through the process of slimming centres, Ayurvedic massages, health clubs, dieticians - you name it, I had tried it. Every failure was very discouraging, and I almost gave up. This time it was not inspiration but instead it was a very mature decision that I had to take about how I want to live.

**SM: Could you give us a brief overview about the type of diet you followed when you began your weight loss plan?**

**SK:** As you know I am not a dietician, and being a food lover it was very difficult initially. The secret of my weight loss mantra is 'don't deprive, don't indulge'. When you eat every morsel think that you are going to taste only. Don't fill your stomach - by the time you finish your meal there should be enough and more space left for another meal in your stomach. Never starve whenever you have cravings. Keep eating seasonal fruits instead of junk foods. You will not see the positive results for couple of weeks, but don't be disheartened. Don't keep a short period to achieve your goal – weight loss takes time!

**SM: How much weight have you lost since you started your lifestyle changes?**

**SK:** Exactly 25 kgs.

**SM: It is often said that it is impossible to lose weight once you cross a particular age. Do you believe that is true?**

**SK:** On the contrary! It is easy to lose weight as you grow old, as you can give undivided attention to your health because you will not have the pressure of other responsibilities like education, career etc.

**SM: What sort of exercise plan do you currently follow? Are you still trying to lose weight?**

**SK:** Since reducing my weight, my knee pain has subsided. So now I enjoy brisk walking for one hour, do a little weight training once in a while and cycle regularly. Yes, now I enjoy losing weight!! I want to lose another 10 Kg in the coming months, and progress has been good so far.

**SM: Thank you very much for your valuable time. I have absolutely no doubt that you are and will be an inspiration to many of us!**

**SK:** My pleasure!



\*\*\* Pictures used with permission of Mr Kumar.



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