

High flavanol chocolate can protect skin from UV damage

By Katie Bird , 04-Sep-2009

High flavanol chocolate can help protect the skin against UV damage although marketing on this claim may be challenging.

Eating chocolate produced by a method which preserves the high antioxidant content can significantly increase the skin's minimal erythema dose (MED) – the dose of UV needed to make the skin go red – according to a recent study.

Thirty subjects were given either the high flavanol chocolate (manufactured by Barry Callebaut using its patented Acticoa method) or the low flavanol chocolate, an identical recipe but manufactured using a normal method.

The subjects were given a 20g portion of their allotted chocolate daily and after 12 weeks the MED of those in the high flavanol group was more than double that of the low flavanol group.

Although the MED is a marker of photoprotection, study author Stefanie Williams warned that this is not a replacement for sun cream.

"The SPF provided by UV filters such as zinc oxide and titanium dioxide is significantly higher than that offered by flavanol rich substances. This is an additional measure," she said.

The chocolate's effect is due to the very high flavanol content of the chocolate and its antioxidant properties, she explained. *"A 20g portion of the chocolate contains 660mg of flavanols, whereas one green tea serving would contain 47mg and red wine about 160mg."*

Manufacturing method preserves flavanols

Chocolate, even the dark variety, produced by a normal manufacturing method does not have such strong antioxidant effects, she continued, as a number of different steps including heat in the manufacturing process reduce the flavanol content.

High flavanol chocolate produced using this method is already on the market and fits neatly into the beauty from within trend. However, companies need to tread carefully before making skin health claims for this kind of product.

An aspect of the 2006 nutrition and health claims regulation that is yet to be resolved centres on a nutrition profiling scheme that would prevent products high in sugar, saturated fat and salt from making health claims of any kind.

As chocolate has a relatively high fat and sugar content it could be impossible for the brand to make any health claims relating to its high antioxidant content, skin health or otherwise.

Barry Callebaut, which has patented the Acticoa technology, is currently working with individual processors to reduce fat and sugar content in the hope of making it acceptable under the proposed legislation.

Source: *Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology*

Volume 8, Pages 169-173

Eating chocolate can significantly protect the skin from UV light

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