It’s no secret that weight control is the top health concern among North Americans. We spend literally tens of millions of dollars every year on the latest diets, exercise gadgets and pills. The sobering truth is that despite the plethora of information and supposed “breakthrough” weight loss programs, we are simply becoming fatter and fatter.

But the news isn’t all bad. Over the last several years, scientists have discovered that one food, long thought of as “junk food,” can actually contribute to healthy and lasting weight loss.

So what food is it? Chocolate — that’s right, chocolate. Of course, not just any chocolate will do the trick (in fact, the more common forms of “candy” chocolate are contributors to the obesity epidemic). But findings from numerous studies show that raw, unalkalized chocolate that is cold processed, high in natural cocoa nutrients and devoid of processed sugars, hydrogenated oils and other artificial ingredients, can provide the body with a powerful weight control tool.
12 Ways Cocoa Promotes Weight Loss

For many people, chocolate’s weight control benefits extend from the suppression of appetite to the enhancement of mood. Research suggests several explanations as to how chocolate might aid in weight loss.

1. Optimizes Nutrition. Much of today's common diet is comprised of empty calories. If the body is not receiving the nutrients it needs, it produces the urge to eat more. Cocoa, on the other hand, provides the appropriate amount of vitamins and minerals the body needs, thus decreasing the urge for added “fuel.”

2. Balances Blood Sugar. Cocoa and dark chocolate help stabilize blood sugar levels, reducing hypoglycemic episodes and binge-eating behaviors. They also promote healthy insulin sensitivity and proper glucose metabolism, which minimizes the conversion of glucose into fat.

3. Normalizes Appetite. One of cocoa’s active compounds—anandamide, also called the “bliss chemical”—helps block the brain's appetite center. Anandamide “tricks” the mind into believing something sweet has been consumed, thus decreasing the urge for added “fuel.”

4. Fights Depression. Cocoa stimulates the dopamine and norepinephrine pathways in the brain, which lessen depression and are associated with decreased appetite and weight loss.

5. Delivers Phenylethylamine (PEA). This chemical produces effects similar to those of amphetamine, which makes one feel giddy, euphoric and excited. Researchers also believe that PEA stimulates the production of dopamine in the brain’s pleasure center. Such emotions counter the depression typically associated with dieting and restrictive dietary intake.

6. Increases Fiber. Surprisingly, cocoa is an excellent source of fiber, which helps block fat absorption, creates a feeling of fullness when eating, and is associated with decreased weight.

7. Boosts Endorphins. Cocoa increases the body’s endorphin levels, which naturally decreases the need to eat high-sugar, high-fat foods. The “high” one gets from the dark chocolate supersedes any enjoyment one might get from eating, so the focus shifts to eating for nutrition rather than pleasure.

8. Increases Serotonin. This calming neurotransmitter helps promote a balanced mood. Carbohydrates like chocolate help stimulate its production, and the alkaloids found in cocoa also help raise serotonin levels.

9. Relieves Inflammation. Cocoa’s primary compounds help relieve low-grade inflammation. Chronic inflammation is associated with low leptin levels, which increases appetite.

10. Delivers Theobromine. Similar to caffeine (though not as strong), theobromine may produce a milder, pleasant stimulatory effect.

11. Substitutes Good for Bad. Instead of consuming high-calorie chocolates loaded with sugars, bad fats and other harmful ingredients, look for chocolate products that are high in cold-processed cocoa, provide high levels of cocoa’s flavanols and other nutrients, and are sweetened with natural sweeteners. This substitution will decrease bad fat, bad sugar and calorie intake and increase consumption of nutrients essential to the body.

12. Increases Energy. An added benefit of cocoa’s accumulative effects seems to be added energy, which can improve one’s ability to exercise and lessen the desire to seek out unhealthy foods as an energy source.