

The Sweet Truth About Cocoa Butter

Nothing melts in your mouth like chocolate—that's one of the reasons so many people love it. Chocolate's creamy, melting qualities come from cocoa butter, the naturally occurring fat found in cocoa beans. Many plants are rich sources of natural fats—olives, soybeans, peanuts, avocados and sunflower seeds, to name a few. But only the cocoa bean provides the creamy and luxurious fat known as cocoa butter.

The Story of Cocoa Butter

Like many trees, the cacao tree produces fruit. Inside this fruit are seeds known as "cocoa beans." When cocoa beans are crushed and pressed, cocoa butter and cocoa powder are released, both of which are essential to chocolate making.

Why Cocoa Butter?

The first "eating" chocolate was made in 1847 by adding cocoa butter to ground cocoa beans and sugar. Look on the ingredient label of any chocolate bar today and you'll find "cocoa butter" listed. It's an essential ingredient in chocolate.

Cocoa butter contributes to the delightful mouth-feel and flavor release of chocolate, and its unique and valuable characteristics set it apart from other plant-derived fats:

- **Melting Point**

Cocoa butter is solid at room temperature and melts rather quickly in a 90°F - 93°F temperature range, just below body temperature (98.6°F). This distinction is responsible for chocolate's pleasant, melt-in-your-mouth sensation, a characteristic unique to cocoa butter.

- **Contraction**

When liquid cocoa butter becomes solid, it contracts slightly, which keeps it from binding to a mould. This important property allows chocolate to be easily removed from moulds and gives us popular shaped confections like chocolate Easter bunnies, hearts, leaves, coins and more.

Cocoa Butter and You

Because cocoa butter naturally contains saturated fat, many people wonder how it will affect their cholesterol levels. Stearic acid is the predominate saturated fat in cocoa butter. Stearic acid is unique and research has shown that it has an overall **neutral** effect on blood cholesterol.¹ In fact, studies indicate that eating chocolate on a daily basis, without an increase in calories in overall diet, may have *no effect* on blood cholesterol levels.²

¹Kris-Etherton PM, Derr JA, Mitchell DC. The role of fatty acid saturation on plasma lipids, lipoproteins and apolipoproteins. Effects of whole foods diets high in cocoa butter, olive oil, soybean oil, dairy butter and milk chocolate on the plasma lipids of young men. *Metabolism*. 1993;42:130-4.

²Kris-Etherton PM, Derr JA, Mustad VA, Seligson FH, Pearson TA. A milk chocolate bar/day substituted for a high carbohydrate snack increases high density lipoprotein cholesterol in young men on a NCEP/ADA Step One diet. *Am J Clin Nutr*. 1994;60(6):1037S-42S.



A Feel Good Fat

From the bean to the bar, cocoa butter is an essential part of chocolate. Its exceptional characteristics are responsible for chocolate's unique mouth-feel and neutral effect on blood cholesterol levels. While there is still much to learn about this distinctive fat, just like chocolate, it's something to feel good about.

Good for You, Inside and Out

Because cocoa butter is solid at room temperature, when applied to the skin it forms a thin protecting barrier that locks in moisture and blocks out harsh outside elements. That is why cocoa butter is commonly referred to as the "ultimate moisturizer" and used as a key ingredient in many lotions, lip balms, cosmetics and even anti-aging and scar reducing topical treatments. In fact, doctors and scientists recognize cocoa butter as a skin protectant often recommended for care of dry skin conditions.

Myth Melting

Myth: Cocoa butter is a type of butter.

Fact: According to the Food and Drug Administration, "butter" is made exclusively from milk, cream or both. Given this definition, cocoa butter is not technically a "butter." It is a fat that comes from the cocoa bean, the seeds inside the fruit of the cacao tree.

Myth: Cocoa butter contains cholesterol.

Fact: Cholesterol from foods is only found in foods of animal origin, such as meat, fish, seafood, eggs and dairy products. Because cocoa butter comes from a plant, it does not contain cholesterol.

Myth: Cocoa butter raises blood cholesterol levels.

Fact: Cocoa butter has been found to have an overall neutral effect on blood cholesterol levels. While researchers are still investigating this effect, it is believed that this is due to cocoa butter's naturally occurring fats called stearic acid, a unique saturated fat that does not raise blood cholesterol levels, and oleic acid.

Myth: Cocoa butter contains partially hydrogenated oil, a trans fat.

Fact: Partially hydrogenated oils, the most prominent source of trans fats in the diet, are man-made and have been linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. **Cocoa butter is a naturally-occurring fat that is not hydrogenated and contains no trans fat.**



For more information on cocoa and chocolate, please visit www.chocolateusa.org.