

# NATIONAL COCOA DAY

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December 13th is National Cocoa Day. With the cooler temps and winter upon us, what better way to warm up than drinking a cup of hot cocoa? Americans often use hot chocolate and hot cocoa interchangeably despite there being a difference between the two. Let's dive in and take a closer look at cocoa and its potential benefits.

First, hot chocolate is made by using ground chocolate containing cocoa butter (or vegetable oil). It is mixed with hot milk and is called drinking chocolate which is another name for hot chocolate.

Hot cocoa is made from cocoa powder. Cocoa powder is made when cocoa beans are harvested, dried, fermented and heated. Cocoa butter is removed with the heating process and then leftover solids are milled into cocoa powder.

Cocoa is one of the richest sources of polyphenols. It is especially abundant in flavanols, which have potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects. Studies have suggested that cocoa may improve cardiovascular health by lowering blood pressure, reducing clotting and improving lipid and glucose metabolism. A possible reason for this may be the increasing nitric oxide availability, which reduces blood pressure, and its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Unfortunately, there isn't a reliable way to estimate which chocolates have more antioxidants as they are affected by heating and other processes. These studies looked at cocoa powder and dark chocolate, not just any type of chocolate. So if you want to add chocolate to your diet, do so in moderation as most commercial chocolate has ingredients that add fat, sugar and calories. Note it is important to stick to the portions recommended for chocolate and combine it with a healthy well balanced diet.

Even though more research is needed on this topic, I think National Cocoa Day is a good reason to enjoy a hot cup of homemade hot cocoa. If you enjoy a chocolate flavor and not so much a hot beverage, add plain cocoa to your low-fat milk or morning oats.

Try out this recipe and make your own cup of homemade hot cocoa!



## Hot Cocoa

Makes 2 servings

### Ingredients

- 2 cups milk
- 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar (can replace with honey or maple syrup)
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla
- 1/8 teaspoon chili powder (if desired)
- 1/8 teaspoon ground cayenne (if desired)
- 1 ounce bittersweet chocolate

### Optional Toppings

Marshmallows, chocolate shavings, cinnamon stick, whipped cream, cinnamon and sugar, candy canes, caramel, toffee bits, coconut, Peppermint Patties, crushed butterscotch candies, candy sprinkles, mini chocolate chips, chopped nuts

### Instructions

1. In medium saucepan over medium-high heat, add milk, cocoa powder, sugar, cinnamon, vanilla extract, chili powder (if desired), cayenne powder (if desired)
2. Mix together with a whisk, add the bittersweet chocolate and heat until chocolate has completely melted and the mixture is hot, but not boiling
3. Divide hot cocoa into 2 mugs and serve with your choice of toppings.

### Nutrition

Calories: 263 Protein: 10 g  
Carbohydrates: 35 g Fat: 11g Fiber: 2.5 g Sodium: 133 mg Potassium: 480 mg (optional toppings not included in analysis)

