

## SECTION 1 BACKGROUND & HISTORY

*The cacao tree was scientifically named 'Theobroma-Cacao', which literally means, "food of the gods".*

*From the ancient, detailed records of the Mesoamericans, we have discovered over 150 documented medicinal uses for cacao.*

There is no denying that cacao has played a major role in the development of both Mesoamerican and European History. Even today, fortunes are won and lost on the price fluctuations of this highly sought-after commodity, as traders bet on the moves of cocoa futures. Cocoa is produced in mass amounts in only a handful of countries around the world, many of which are not always politically or economically stable.

Recent discoveries in Honduras showed traces of cocoa on cups and plates dating back to 2000 B.C. Between 200 and 900 A.D., the Mayan culture celebrated cocoa as a central part of their agriculture, economy, medicine and religion.

Still used today, the word "cacao" is derived from ancient Olmec and subsequent Mayan languages ("kakaw"), while the term "cacahuatl," also related to the root origin of cacao, is from ancient Aztec.



In 1737, Swedish scientist Carolus Linnaeus named the tree that produces these unsightly, yet highly prized cocoa bean pods "Theobroma cacao"—literally meaning "cocoa, food of the gods," in a reference to the mythical history of the tree among ancient Mesoamericans.

While cocoa was a celebrated and valued part of ancient Mesoamerican society, ancient records have also revealed more than 150 uses of cocoa for medicinal purposes.

Europeans were first introduced to cacao by the Spanish conquistadors around 1505 A.D. By the mid-1600's, European healers were "prescribing" cacao as a medicine to stimulate the health function of the spleen and digestive tract, as well as a cure for all manner of ailments and diseases. Cacao was valued as a means to heal colds and coughing attacks, enhance mental acuity, fight inflammation, and improve overall nutrition. In the rest of this paper, we will refer to cacao as cocoa, implying the unprocessed form of this amazing food.

## NOTABLE MENTIONS OF CACAO IN HISTORY

Thomas Jefferson: "The superiority of chocolate, both for health and nourishment, will soon give it the preference over tea and coffee in America which it has in Spain" (1).

William Clark (famed explorer): "I felt my Self [sic] very unwell and derected [sic] a little Chocolate which Mr. McClellan gave us, prepared of which I drunk about a pint and found great relief..."

Baron Justus von Liebig (German chemist): "Chocolate is a perfect food, as wholesome as it is delicious, a beneficent restorer of exhausted power. It is the best friend of those engaged in literary pursuits."

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (lawyer, politician): "It has been shown as proof positive that carefully prepared chocolate is as healthful a food as it is pleasant; that it is nourishing and easily digested... that it is above all helpful to people who must do a great deal of mental work."



## OTHER HISTORICAL REFERENCES

Deanna Pucciarelli and Louis Grivetti from the University of California, Davis recently published a paper titled, “The Medicinal Use of Chocolate in Early North America.” This paper discussed the long history of medicinal chocolate in North America dating back to the 16th century (2). The paper suggested that medicinal chocolate was very prominent in many of the remedies prescribed for an assortment of illnesses, referring to advertisements of the day, including the following: “Always on hand pure cocoa and Homeopathic Chocolate, without any admixture of spices, are to be had, by the single cake or by the box of 25 pounds each.”

In 1849, the Scientific American Journal in 1849 published the statement, “During last summer, those individuals who were habitually using chocolate or broma, neither had attacks of cholera or dysenteric affections, while other in the same families, taking their daily potations of tea, coffee, or simple cold water, were suffers.”

Dr. Albert Bellow suggested that “Cocoa differs from tea and coffee in that it is rich in nutritious food, and having in it no tannin or other deleterious elements, its theobromine, or characteristic property, being connected with albumen – a muscle-making element.”

Cocoa products were considered “well-known [as] valuable foods, since they [act] as respiratory excitants.”



Advertisements in the late 1800's touted cocoa's benefits for patients with asthma, bronchial, and lung trouble.

The famous physician Dr. Benjamin Rush wrote, “Chocolate differs considerably from both [tea and coffee], possessing no exhilarating virtue, or only in a small degree, but is more nutritive, and in South America constitutes a considerable part of the food.”

In his treatment for yellow fever, Dr. Rush recommended, “As soon as the pulse is reduced, I indulge them in weak chocolate.” He recommended chocolate for gout, yellow

fever, and many other diseases at the time. Cocoa was a common medicine included in the well-known “house call” medical bags carried about by doctors during the 19th century. One medical book from the time said this about treating whooping cough:

Let the child live on a light diet, little or no meat, cake, pastry, or heavy food, but an abundance of mucilaginous drinks... [such as] chocolate

Cocoa was a mainstay in medical recommendations throughout Europe, North and South America until the third decade of the 19th century.

A copy of Dr. Pucciarelli and Dr. Grivetti's paper can be found at the World Cocoa Foundation website ([worldcocoafoundation.org](http://worldcocoafoundation.org)).

## POST-INDUSTRIAL CHOCOLATE: FROM GOOD TO BAD

With the coming of the Industrial Revolution, chocolate manufacturers found themselves in regional and global competition for consumers.

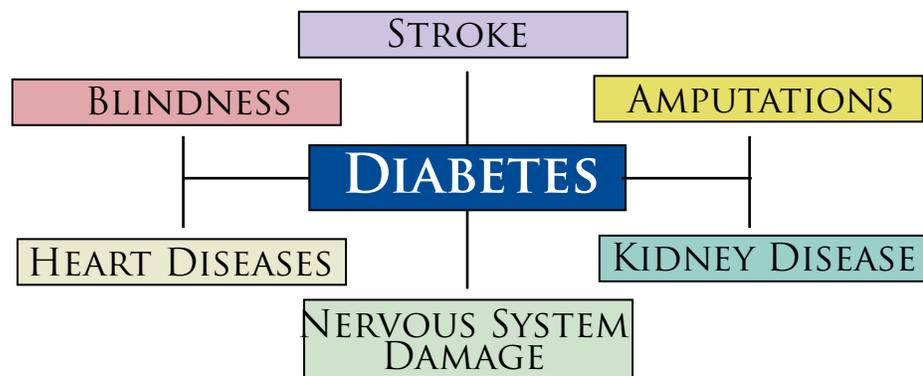
At the same time that chocolate was being served in liquid form as a medicine for the sick, it was also being produced with added fats and sugars as a cheap candy.

The mid- to late-1800s saw the creation of a tremendous market for chocolate penny candy, as well as for fancy boxed chocolates that have since become synonymous with love and courtship.

By the 1950s, chocolate had completely lost its association with health and healing. Many of today's most famous chocolate companies got their start during the Great Depression, known to those in the business as the "hungry thirties" due to the popularity of this cheap diversion from the doldrums of everyday life during the economic crisis. Are we experiencing the "hungry 2000s" today?

## MODERN LIVING. MODERN DISEASES.

Pollution. Global Warming. Stress. Lack of sleep. Poor dietary habits. In today's society, we are at greater risk than ever for health problems. In fact, the majority of Americans already suffer from some kind of preventable (or addressable) health problem: obesity, heart disease, diabetes (or "pre-diabetes").



According to the American Heart Association, more than 910,000 Americans will die of heart disease this year. As a matter of fact, by 2010, heart disease will be the number one killer across the world.. More than 70,000,000 Americans live every day with some form of "heart disease" (high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, stroke, angina (chest pain), heart attack or congenital heart defect).

An epidemic of Type 2 diabetes continues to sweep across the United States; an estimated 24,000,000 Americans struggle with the disease—up more than 3,000,000 people since only 2005. With Type 2 diabetes, either the body does not produce enough "insulin" or the cells "ignore" the insulin. Insulin (a hormone) is needed by the body in order to maintain blood sugar levels (or glucose) for energy. Lack of exercise and excessive weight are key contributors to Type 2 diabetes. And, naturally, there is an inevitable wave of illnesses and disabilities that are brought on by diabetes: heart disease, stroke, blindness, limb amputations, kidney disease and nervous system damage, to name several.

In modern societies, keeping up with a fast-paced lifestyle seems to have taken precedence over healthy living. One simple solution is to pay more attention to what we put in our bodies. Fruits and vegetables are a rarity on fast food menus, yet they are rich sources of antioxidants—a key to maintaining a healthy body.

Only in the past few years has cocoa been reexamined as a health food and a nutritious source of antioxidants, anti-inflammatories, vitamins and minerals. In 2008 alone, over 50 different studies were conducted on the health benefits of cocoa. There have even been human epidemiological studies and dietary trials with cocoa that have yielded interesting results.



*With the health of a nation deteriorating, studies are showing that cacao contains interesting health benefits that could reverse the effects of a fast-paced lifestyle.*