EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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12th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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Yes to chocolate, tea, apples and grapes

16 May 2025



We might have another reason to enjoy our daily cup of tea or small piece of dark chocolate, as a new study from the University of Surrey has found that naturally occurring compounds called flavan-3-ols – found in cocoa, tea, apples and grapes – may improve blood pressure and the health of our blood vessels.

The research, published in the European Journal of Preventive Cardiology, analysed data from 145 randomised controlled studies, and found that regular consumption of flavan-3-ols can lead to a reduction in blood pressure readings, particularly in people with elevated or high blood pressure. In some cases, the average blood pressure-lowering effects were comparable to those seen with some medications.

Flavan-3-ols were also found to improve the function of the endothelium – the inner lining of blood vessels – which is crucial for overall cardiovascular health. This improvement occurred independently of blood pressure changes, suggesting a broader positive impact on the circulatory system.

Professor Christian Heiss, lead-author of the study and Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at the University of Surrey, said:

“The findings are encouraging for those looking for accessible ways to manage their blood pressure and support their heart health through enjoyable dietary changes. Incorporating small amounts of commonly consumed foods like tea, apples, dark chocolate, or cocoa powder into a daily balanced diet could provide beneficial amounts of flavan-3-ols.

“While not a replacement for prescribed medications or medical advice, including more flavan-3-ol-rich foods in a daily routine could be a valuable addition to a healthy lifestyle, especially for those with higher blood pressure. These are findings that, although promising, require ongoing investigation.”

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