



# Chocolate

## SPA TREATMENTS

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*Getting dipped can keep you fit*

BY CURTIS VREELAND

If Milton Hershey were alive today, undoubtedly, he would be amazed at how his chocolate products have evolved. The maker of the Hershey Kiss – which celebrated its 100th birthday last year – would find spa patrons at his historic Hershey Hotel gleefully bobbing like marshmallows in bubbling vats of whipped cocoa. “Actually, we don’t dip our clients in chocolate,” clarified Jennifer Wayland-Smith, former spa director at the Spa at The Hotel Hershey, now with Golden Door Spa at The Boulders. “But we do emphasize that it’s all the fun of chocolate without the calories.”

The health benefits of eating dark chocolate have been widely reported. Now, recent medical studies advise that additional benefits are available; scientists and psychologists report that chocolate is good for skin care and psychological stimulation. Not only is this sweet news for the calorie-conscious consumer, but also for spa operators who see opportunity in pairing America's infatuation with premium chocolate and functional health services. What once started as an indulgent seasonal option for Valentine's Day has blossomed into a variety of year-round treatments at a half dozen or more innovative spas.

## *The Pharmacopeia of Chocolate*

Skin care applications of chocolate/cocoa have come on the market only within the past year and are a niche that has a lot of potential. A recently published Japanese study found that a topical application of cacao bean and cola nut extracts suppressed wrinkle formation, dermal connective alteration and collagen accumulation. The researchers attributed these benefits to the extracts' high polyphenol and xanthine (both protect the skin against UV-induced wrinkles) content.

Cocoa butter is an excellent emollient and is absorbed quickly by the skin. Cocoa butter with vitamin E is the plastic surgeon's choice for scar healing and reducing stretch marks; such properties were recognized as early as the 18th century. In "The Natural

History of Chocolate," published in 1719, De Quélus noted that liberal applications of "chocolate oil" could "clear and plump [the skin when it was] dry, rough....[and] keep one's arms from rusting, because it contains less water than any other oil..."

Cocoa shells or husks can be used as exfoliants. Cocoa husks reportedly have antioxidant properties that can delay aging, accelerate the burning of fat and provide psychological stimulation. Aztec nobility used cacao flowers in perfumed baths, according to the "Badianus Codex," published in 1552. Although chocolate is not included in the fragrant pharmacy of essential oils used in aromatherapy, its aroma can stimulate positive feelings. "As soon as they smell chocolate, it makes them excited," said Liz Sutcliffe, a Hershey Spa massage technician, about her massage clients. "They get this childlike expression; they giggle, they lick their shoulders. You don't get that with jasmine and chamomile."

According to studies, the skin benefits from eating chocolate as well. A German medical study found that women who drank a half-cup of flavanol-enriched cocoa daily for three months developed smoother skin. Further, the women's skin was less scaly and red after it was exposed to ultraviolet light.

Cocoa and chocolate are sources of energy and well-being. With their concentration of calories, cocoa and chocolate are among the most concentrated vegetable energy suppliers. They contain no cholesterol, but do contain stearic acid (a saturated

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## chocolate spa treatments

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fatty acid), which may promote the production of “good” cholesterol (HDL). Flavonoids in cocoa may counteract the oxidation that turns HDL into LDL (“bad” cholesterol); this transformation is suspected of causing diseases of the heart and blood vessels.

Cocoa is rich in polyphenols, which recent medical studies have found to prevent blood clotting and have an antioxidant effect, somewhat like a natural preservative. Additionally, polyphenols may protect the body against substances that damage the immune system and can cause rheumatism and arthritis. They can also neutralize free radicals that cause cancer.

Cocoa and chocolate contain minimal quantities of theobromine and caffeine – one ounce of dark chocolate has only about as much caffeine as a cup of decaffeinated coffee. These two alkaloids have a stimulating effect on the operation of the central nervous system, heart muscles, production of urine and relaxation of the respiratory muscles. Ingestion of theobromine and caffeine through moderate consumption of cocoa and

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chocolate can produce an elevation of mood and improved concentration.

Cocoa and chocolate contain a host of minerals (calcium, magnesium, potassium, sodium and iron) and vitamins (A, B<sub>1</sub> Thiamine, B<sub>2</sub> Riboflavin, C, D and E); all are indispensable for proper operation of various functions. They also contain two beneficial psycho-active components, namely phenylethylamine (PEA) and anandamide. PEA is a compound that correlates with improved mood, even promoting euphoric states (i.e. – love). Its connection with chocolate was discovered by Michael Libowitz, author of the popular 1983 book “The Chemistry of Love.” Reporters were quick to dub Libowitz’s theory as the “chocolate theory of love.” When combined with dopamine that is naturally present in the brain, it can act as an anti-depressant. Anandamide is a cannabinoid neurotransmitter – like the THC in marijuana – that stimulates the brain, allowing “feel good” motivation and pleasure sensations to be transmitted more easily. (The name “ananda” means “bliss” or “delight” in Sanskrit.)

### *Chocolate Spa Products*

With benefits to the skin, mood and long-term health, it’s no surprise resource partners are beginning to add this sweet treat to their product offerings. Salt of the Earth utilizes the prehistoric salt beds in its home state of Utah to develop a line of spa body treatments. Utilizing locally harvested salt from the Great Salt Lake, sometimes called America’s Dead Sea, Salt of the Earth has been manufacturing spa body treatments for nine years. In addition to the nutritive properties of this ancient sea salt, the company relies upon grapeseed oil, which is quickly absorbed by the skin and contains vitamins A and E and silicon. Salt of the Earth’s products are available in a range of scents, including chocolate, which is popular during the winter holidays.

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**“Although many of our clients initially may be drawn to chocolate for its reputed aphrodisiac property, they soon come to appreciate that chocolate feels good, smells good and has physiological benefits.”**

Sweet Beauty, located near world-class chocolatiers in the Pacific Northwest, proudly features premium quality chocolate in its skin care formulations. With a passion for both skin care and chocolate, Lisa Françoise developed premium chocolate-based spa products for retail and professional use under the Sweet Beauty Spa label. Having written her CIDESCO thesis on chocolate several years earlier, Françoise was already familiar with chocolate's skin-healthy attributes, or as she described it, “what's good for the inside is just as good for the outside.” Françoise's philosophy is to design products that are “simple, easy and elevate the soul. After all, what makes you feel better than chocolate?”

Her products incorporate real chocolate sourced from some of the country's top chocolate makers. They are also on-trend, being the United States' only available organic and fair-trade chocolate spa products. “You can't use a luxury product at the expense of someone else,” said Françoise. One of Sweet Beauty Spa's top-three-selling products is Cherish, a chocolate, coconut and sugar scrub made from cocoa powder, ground cacao nibs and essential chocolate oil. Crave, another top-selling product and one in a line of five chocolaty lip balms, contains 65 percent cacao mass chocolate. The third popular product is Chocolate Milk Bath, developed for those women dying to bathe in a vat of chocolate. To maximize the skin-moisturizing properties of milk, known as far back as Cleopatra, this bath product contains whole milk and buttermilk powders, as well as cocoa powder.

## *Chocolate Treatments Unwrapped*

An influx in the development of chocolate products naturally translates into spas offering more chocolate-themed treatments. Here is a look at some ISPA spa members who have added chocolate offerings to their spas.

**LaBelle Day Spas (Palo Alto, Calif.)** Founded by Bella Schneider, a noted esthetician, LaBelle Day Spa shuns holistic, short-term, trendy treatments for services that are clinically proven and show results. The spa offers one chocolate-based signature treatment, the Chocolate Mousse Pedicure, which includes a nourishing milk bath, chocolate scrub, therapeutic mud mask, massage and pedicure. “The chocolate scrub and mask enhance blood flow and softens the skin,” said Corporate Relations Director Tiffany Schneider Collins. Additionally, chocolate's slimming properties, due to the diuretic effect of its caffeine content, are great for the ankles and feet. “Chocolate is awesome for edema,” said podologist and nail technician Jennifer Smith. Sometimes, the spa pairs the pedicure with serving Teuscher truffles. The Mousse au Chocolat Body Hydrante used in this service is specially developed for LaBelle and is sold in its retail store.

**Moonlight Spa (Big Sky, Mont.)** Moonlight Spa is located at Moonlight Basin, an alpine paradise and four-season resort located in southwest Montana. Its spa offered a Chocolate Body Wrap this past Valentine's Day, advertising the treatment as “Indulge Yourself in Chocolate.” Not surprisingly, chocoholics loved it, and the spa decided to offer the treatment year-round on an as-requested basis. Catering to both coffee and chocolate lovers, this winter it will debut a Mocha Latté Body Wrap. And attempting to capture the earthy aromas of pioneer kitchens, the spa will grind the ingredients on-premise. “There is nothing more satisfying than smelling freshly roasted coffee,” said Spa Director Patricia Gorder. Moonlight Spa uses products custom produced by Prima Fleur.

**Stoweflake Mountain Resort & Spa (Stowe, Vt.)** Encouraged by the success of a regional chocolate show hosted by the spa in

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May 2006, the Spa at Stoweflake now offers several unique treatments available year-round. "Although many of our clients initially may be drawn to chocolate for its reputed aphrodisiac property, they soon come to appreciate that chocolate feels good, smells good and has physiological benefits," explained Spa Director Jesse George. The spa's Build Your Own Body Treatment is an individually customized service beginning with aromatherapy salt or sugar exfoliants, followed by moisturizing aromatherapy body butter and topped with a massage using fragrant oils. The two most requested treatments are the chocolate and coffee services.

**The Spa at The Hershey Hotel (Hershey, Pa.)** Opened in 2001, the spa was a pioneer in offering chocolate-based, year-round treatments. This should not come as any surprise for a spa located in "Chocolatetown, USA." The popularity of these chocolate signature treatments grew so rapidly that within three years the spa doubled in size. Among its seven signature chocolate-themed treatments, the most popular is the Chocolate Fondue Wrap (7,600 guests enjoyed it in 2006), followed by the Whipped Cocoa Bath, a treatment patented for its unique visual and sensual effects. "This treatment is patent-worthy because of the positive effects of aromatherapy produced by the cocoa scent; the benefits to the skin associated with milk baths; and the fine, long-lasting bubbles created by the concoction," explained Wayland-Smith. Other treatments include a Chocolate Sugar Scrub, Chocolate Bean Polish, Cocoa Massage, Chocolate Hydrotherapy and Cocoa Facial Experience. Interestingly, the Cocoa Facial Experience links health benefits with Hershey's history; one of the ingredients is caramel, which harkens back to Milton Hershey's roots as one of America's largest caramel makers before he decided to specialize in chocolate.

With antioxidant, anti-lipidemic, anti-hypertensive, anti-thrombotic, anti-carcinogenic and micronutrient-rich properties, chocolate is one treat your entire body will thank you for consuming. Whether it's the products they are using or the treatments they are choosing, chocolate lovers are discovering their local spas are the best source for a sweet and healthful treat. ■

**CURTIS VREELAND** specializes in tracking emerging trends in the confectionery industry. With his more than 20 years experience in the chocolate industry, he has published more than two dozen articles, the latest being a thorough analysis of the U.S. chocolate market for Packaged Facts/Marketresearch.com, an international research company. Passionate about chocolate, Vreeland has visited most of the major cocoa-producing regions in the world. In 2004, he founded the Next Generation Chocolatier; held every other year in New York City, this national competition's mission is to acknowledge American artisan chocolatiers who are gifted and ready for prime time.