Chocolate: The Happy Food
(or, Take Your Medicine)

Listen in as Doctor Brown, an imaginary expert in chocolate science, gives chocolate information and advice to our writer . . .

"I want you to drink a cup of hot cocoa every day," my doctor said with a wink. "Made with good cocoa powder, sugar, and milk. Dark chocolate is one of the best foods to make you feel happy and help keep you healthy." This is my kind of medicine, I thought.

The Wonders of Chocolate

Dr. Brown spent the next 10 minutes teaching me some of the wonders of chocolate. I learned that chocolate has been used as medicine for hundreds of years to treat everything from stomach aches and fevers to just being tired. The bark, leaves, and flowers of the cacao tree have even been used to treat burns and cuts.

"Some scientists say that eating dark chocolate and cocoa can make you healthier. Some say chocolate can even help you stop coughing.

"But before you go out and buy a whole grocery cart full of candy bars, let me remind you that it should be dark chocolate rather than milk chocolate—and definitely not white. Cocoa is naturally bitter, and it takes sugar to make it taste sweet. But the sugar adds calories to a chocolate bar. You'll need to exercise more so you don't gain extra weight."

Free Radicals and Antioxidants

"Another amazing thing about chocolate is how it fights free radicals."

Free what? I thought we were talking about chocolate, not politics!

"Free radicals have nothing to do with politics. They are 'bad guys.' These tiny particles can cause damage to healthy cells in your body, making it easier for you to get sick. Antioxidants are the 'good guys,' who 'clean up' free radicals, so you stay healthier. They can even repair cells that have already been damaged.

"Your body makes some of its own antioxidants.
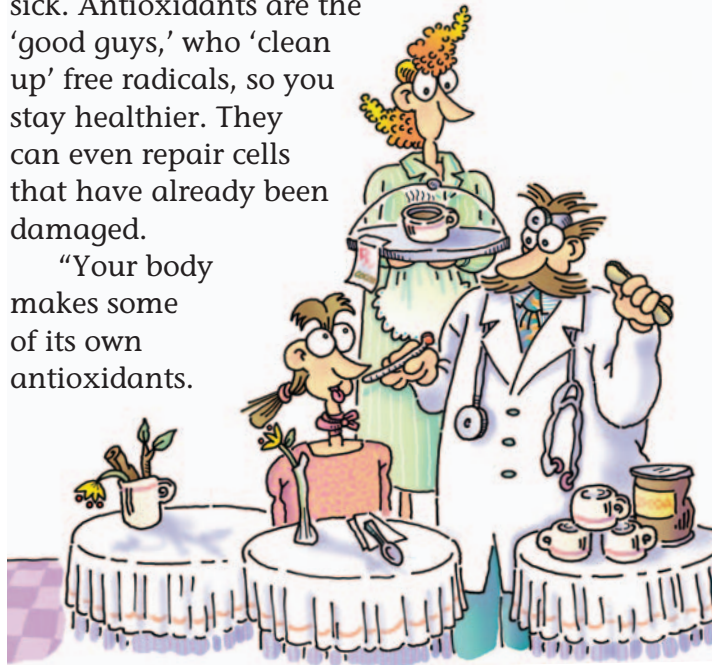
You can also get them from foods you eat, such as berries, broccoli, spinach, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, cantaloupe, carrots, and yes, you guessed it, chocolate! When you feel stressed out, it's important to eat foods with lots of antioxidants. Homemade hot cocoa is a great source."

Wow! I never imagined chocolate could do all that! With a smile and wave, Dr. Brown was off to see his next patient. I could hardly wait to get home and start taking my "medicine."

Adapted from an article by Janet Buckwalter
Illustrated by Heidi Graf

Recipe for Hot Cocoa

- 1 tablespoon unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2 tablespoons sugar (or to taste)
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1 cup milk
- dash of vanilla extract

Mix cocoa, sugar, and water into a thick syrup. Stir in milk and vanilla. Heat, drink, and be healthy!