



Wandering & Wondering

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GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT CHOCOLATE

“Chocolate is indeed a stimulant and it activates the brain in a really special way,” says Larry Stevens, professor of psychological sciences at Northern Arizona University (NAU). “It can increase brain characteristics of attention, and it also significantly affects blood pressure levels.” Stevens’ research study, published in the journal *NeuroRegulation* (2015) and sponsored by the Hershey Company, is the first to examine the acute effects of chocolate on attentional characteristics of the brain and the first-ever study of chocolate consumption performed using electroencephalography, or EEG technology. Historically, chocolate has been recognized as a vasodilator, meaning that it widens blood vessels and lowers blood pressure in the long run, but chocolate also contains some powerful stimulants. The results for the participants who consumed the 60 percent cacao chocolate showed that the brain was more alert and attentive after consumption. Their blood pressure also increased for a short time. The most interesting results came from one of the control conditions, a 60 percent cacao chocolate which included L-theanine, an amino acid found in green tea that acts as a relaxant. “L-theanine is a really fascinating product that lowers blood pressure and produces what we call alpha waves in the brain that are very calm and peaceful,” Stevens says. For participants who consumed the high-cacao content chocolate with L-theanine, researchers recorded an immediate drop in blood pressure. “It’s remarkable. The potential here is for a heart healthy chocolate confection that contains a high level of cacao with L-theanine that is good for your heart, lowers blood pressure, and helps you pay attention,” Stevens says. [news item from Northern Arizona University]

LIKE A DOG

“A cynic may be pardoned for thinking that this is a dog’s life. The Greek word *kunikos*, from which cynic comes,

was originally an adjective meaning doglike, from *kuon* (dog). The word was most likely applied to the Cynic philosophers because of the nickname *Kuon* given to Diogenes of Sinope, the prototypical Cynic. He is said to have performed such actions as barking in public, urinating on the leg of a table...” (from an etymological desk calendar, publisher unknown)

ORIGIN OF THE HIGH FIVE

Former Giants manager Dusty Baker and rookie outfielder Glenn Burke were L.A. Dodgers teammates in 1977. When Burke hit his 30th home run of the year, he raised his arm in a victory salute to Baker, who slapped Burke’s hand, thereby creating what came to be known as a high five. (*Parade Magazine*, May 31)

HUMANE KINDNESS

University of Sydney (Australia) biologists now recommend killing invasive cane toads by refrigerating then freezing them so they lose consciousness and die painlessly. Previously, the recommendation was to hit them on the head with a hammer. (*Earthweek.com*, May 29)

SWAMI SEZ

Earth is the only planet not named after a god.

OLD SOUL

“When I’m doing homework, I like listening to Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Buddy Holly...” (rattling off several other singers’ names from the Fifties, a preteen boy brags to fellow swimmers in the Brink Pool men’s locker room)

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