

# Want to Improve Your Creativity and Focus? Try Eating Chocolate for Breakfast How I use chocolate to get into flow states on demand.

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Shoot! I've run out of chocolate! I'm writing my flow article today — I need to replenish my supply ASAP!

That's how my Sunday morning started at 5 a.m.

## Why chocolate? For writing?

I'm a brain coach, brain nutritionist, brain performance, brain productivity expert who facilitates focus, attention, creativity, motivation, drive and flow states of mind to help my clients to get into "the zone." The zone where we lose track of time and do our best work, where we deliver our best results, and where we have a much bigger chance of coming up with world-

changing innovations that we'll be known for generations into the future.

Most people aren't aware of the fact that any state of mind — flow state or panic attack — has biochemical, brain-chemical "signatures." We have certain molecules circulating in our brain and our blood in any of the mental states we experience.

The coolest part? We can modulate those circulating chemicals through nutrition, lifestyle, environment and behavior.

## Chocolate in your mind

On a molecular level, flow state has a signature expressed in five key brain chemicals — norepinephrine, dopamine, anandamide, serotonin and endorphins. Each time we enter this zone of magic, where aha moments happen at a much higher rate, our brain is showered with these chemicals of flow.

Chocolate is one of few foods that stimulates all the five brain chemicals of flow. It either has the building blocks for these chemicals, or it makes our brain create more of them due to the hundreds of phytochemicals chocolate contains, or chocolate compounds help flow chemicals to stay in the brain for longer — all the avenues of flow-boosting effects that chocolate produces aren't clear yet.

Chocolate is one (and basically only, besides black truffles) of the richest sources of what researchers nicknamed a "bliss molecule" — anandamide. Our brain naturally creates a lot of anandamide when we are in flow states. By eating chocolate in the form of chocolate bars, hot chocolate, cacao, etc., we can intentionally boost levels of this bliss molecule. Chocolate additionally has compounds that make bliss hang around longer — anandamide doesn't have a long "brain life" of action; it dissipates quickly.

Anandamide binds to the same receptors as active compounds in marijuana do, by the way. Receptors that are present not just in the brain but throughout our whole body and are a part of the endocannabinoid system that reduces anxiety, helps our body and mind cope with stress and produces feelings of happiness and pleasure. Anandamide affects our memory, sleep, appetite and pain receptors, among other important processes.

Another huge benefit of chocolate is increased blood circulation to the brain, linked to any state of high performance, better brain and mental health, prevention of cognitive decline, memory formation, and learning abilities.

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# Productivity and chocolate

Although many entrepreneurs, high performers, executives and innovative leaders are known for looking into nootropics and smart drug substances to increase their cognitive capacities, not many are known for their love of chocolate. I see it as one delicious oversight.

Most of the nootropics and brain-enhancing substances available are a miss, not a hit. Medications that people use to deal with ADHD, brain fog, distractions and anxiety have serious side effects. And yet chocolate, a psychoactive substance that has proven brain-enhancing effect, has for the most part been forgotten and neglected. I partially blame this on the candy industry, which has robbed true chocolate of its brain goodness.

In certain studies, chocolate has been found to have significant positive effects on many brain states, brain health factors, cognitive performance, memory, learning, preventing cognitive decline, and even boosting gut health as a prebiotic substance.

The kind of chocolate that produces the most benefits is 75-85% cacao bars — the higher the percentage, the better it works. In the United States, the minimum requirement for anything to be considered chocolate is 10% cacao; in the EU

25%; and in the UK 20-24% (for milk chocolate). Cacao beans are expensive, which is why many candy producers try to minimize the cost of the product by using less. All the sugar and other non-food additions make it a brain disaster, not a brain booster.

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## Chocolate flow recipe

When I ran out of chocolate this morning, I went to my "cacao dealer," a local coffee/chocolate shop in Playa Del Carmen, Mexico to get my flow fix — a 10-ounce, 100% cacao bar. This bar usually lasts me for 10 days. About 30 minutes before the beginning of my writing session, I consume half an ounce of chocolate. About an hour into my writing, I consume the same amount again to finish strong.

I also consume chocolate for any activity that requires me to be creative, productive, collaborative, open-minded or flexible, such as putting together a presentation pitch, brainstorming strategies for developing my brand, looking into new avenues to deliver my coaching or even going for a dance class.

Chocolate also helps with memory and learning, so I have a piece of dark chocolate before Spanish class as well.

## **Related: 7 Simple Ways to Get Into a Flow State When Writing**

### **A chocolate booster for your next team's brainstorming session**

When helping companies to create a better brainstorming experience and boost the culture of innovation, I always recommend including dark chocolate in the process because of all the aforementioned history and research data.

If you have a space dedicated to group brainstorming or innovation activities, place some dark chocolate at the entrance with a poster on its brain benefits. Having a solution-oriented, problem-solving Zoom session with your team? How about sending everyone some dark chocolate and collectively microdosing before the session?

I remember volunteering for one of Seth Godin's events in NYC a few years back. At one of the breaks towards the end, I saw Godin looking a bit tired — speaking for hours at any interactive event or workshop can definitely be exhausting for the mind. I happened to have a 100% dark chocolate bar with me, so I offered it to him. He replied "Just what I needed" and happily proceeded to eat half of a two-ounce bar on the spot.

It's up to you what to do with this information: You can disregard it, not believe it and brush it off as non-essential, or you can try something that's been used by humans for thousands of years. Test it out and see what happens.

Any brain state is conditioned by a bunch of molecules circulating in our brain at any given point in time. You can wait for the lucky moments when chemical elements come together "naturally" to produce the elusive state of flow we often crave, or you can design for it. And heck, do we really need another reason to eat more chocolate?

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