

**Herbal Monograph:** Cacao (Theobroma cacao)

**Botanical Name:** Theobroma cacao

**Common Names:** Cacao, Cocoa, Chocolate Tree

**Family:** Malvaceae

**Plant Description:**

Cacao is a small evergreen tree native to the tropical regions of Central and South America. It typically grows between 15–25 feet in height and thrives in humid, shaded environments. The tree produces leathery leaves, small reddish flowers, and large, oval pods that contain the cacao beans used to make chocolate.

**Parts Used:**

- Seeds (cacao beans)
- Fruit pulp
- Cacao husks
- Leaves (less commonly used)

**Active Constituents:**

- Theobromine (a mild stimulant)
- Caffeine (in smaller amounts than coffee)
- Flavonoids (antioxidants)
- Polyphenols
- Magnesium, Iron, and other minerals
- Anandamide (a neurotransmitter known as the “bliss molecule”)

**Energetics:**

- Taste: Bitter, slightly sweet
- Energy: Warming, stimulating

**Traditional and Modern Uses:**

- Benefits and uses are listed under five categories:
  - Consciousness and Spirituality
    - Opens hearts and re-establishes balance
    - Inner transformation and emotional release. Cacao brings you to the door but doesn't push you through it
    - Increased presence
    - Facilitates Connections
    - Creativity and Learning
    - Help unleash creativity and provide focus
    - Helps you make connections and retain them
    - Helps improve brain fog
  - Workplace Productivity, Decision Making, and Innovation
    - Brings rational mind and intuition together
    - Clarity and ability to prioritize
    - Helps with executive decision making
    - Increase in confidence, decrease in fear
    - Increased stamina
  - Workouts, Sports, and Training
    - Increased energy and motivation
    - Removes mental blocks, increases prioritization
    - Move past mental barriers

- Increases oxygenation to the body more than 80%
- Vasodilation and increased blood flow helps with endurance and altitude
- Stimulates Metabolism
- Medical and Health
  - Highest antioxidant content of any food
  - A superfood and a great source of Iron, Magnesium, Manganese, Copper, Sulphur, Chromium, and available Calcium
  - Recently found to be a rich source of Vitamin D2
  - Contains a variety of essential B vitamins, such as B2, B1, B5, B9, and B5, in addition to vitamin E
  - Contains procyanidins and epicatechins, the same flavonoid phytonutrients found in red wine and berries
  - Increased energy
  - Cacao is one of the richest sources of pyrroloquinoline quinone (PQQ), which is a powerful stimulator of mitochondrial biogenesis. Your mitochondria are the energy basis of all that your cells do. Pure Cacao boosts mitochondrial energy production - and thus your energy
  - Increases blood flow to the brain by 40%
  - The most medically researched aspect of Cacao is its effect on cardiovascular health. Within a few months of regular use (2 or more times per day), it thoroughly cleans the deposits from your arteries, so there is nothing to break loose and cause a heart attack or stroke
  - Cacao reduces bad and increases good cholesterol
  - People who consume pure Cacao daily do not have high blood pressure, even if they are on a high salt diet, are of advanced age, and are overweight. At first use, blood pressure drops only for an hour or two. Continued use for months results in a 24-hour continuous normalization
  - Can help stabilize blood sugar levels
  - There is increasing evidence that cacao drinkers are less likely to develop dementia, senility, and Alzheimer's.
  - Aids in balancing hormones and uplifting moods, helping with PMS
  - Women have reported that pure Cacao can either increase or decrease their menstrual flow
  - One of the most balancing and healing tools for the hormonal system
  - The Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors [MAOIs] and other consciousness compounds in Cacao serve as effective antidepressants
  - Cacao increases oxygenation to all parts of the body. Studies have shown that you get smoother skin texture, improved microcirculation, increased oxygen saturation, and improved skin hydration with even a single cacao use
  - Used correctly, pure Cacao greatly benefits pregnancy, birth, postpartum depression, and lactation. For many women, it works well for morning sickness
  - Cacao extract has been shown to do a far better job than fluoride of remineralizing teeth and preventing the growth of the bacteria whose acids cause cavities, and of slowing the process of plaque formation
  - Cacao contains healthy monounsaturated fats, which have their own role to play in detoxification, as well as in the immune system, and as helpers for metabolism
  - We know many people who have used Cacao to treat addiction or substance abuse and detox from substances such as alcohol, cocaine, and even heroin. It assists in the deeper understanding of the inner issues behind what is happening on the surface. For sure, you can use Cacao itself in an addictive manner, but it will assist you in understanding your

addictive tendencies if that is where you want to go. There is no 'crash' or withdrawal, even for a heavy and prolonged user, if Cacao usage is discontinued abruptly

- Cacao is an excellent prebiotic. It feeds the microbiome, the good microorganisms in your gut that play a crucial, increasingly understood role in health. Cacao contains large amounts of prebiotics and polyphenols, which are essential for the gut microbiome to function at optimum levels
  - There is some research about Cacao as a heavy metal chelator, binding and removing heavy metals from the body
- Cardiovascular Support: Rich in flavonoids, cacao helps improve circulation, lower blood pressure, and support heart health.
  - Mood Enhancement: Theobromine and anandamide contribute to feelings of well-being and mild euphoria.
  - Cognitive Function: Cacao may improve brain function by increasing blood flow to the brain.
  - Energy and Stimulation: As a natural stimulant, cacao provides gentle energy without the jitters associated with caffeine.
  - Anti-Inflammatory Effects: High in antioxidants, cacao helps combat oxidative stress and inflammation.
  - Digestive Aid: Traditionally used to support digestion, particularly in indigenous cultures.

### **Cacao Recipes:**

Cacao is a versatile superfood used in a variety of preparations, from ceremonial beverages to everyday culinary applications. Below are some popular ways to incorporate cacao into daily life:

#### **1. Traditional Cacao Drink: Ingredients:**

- 2-4oz water or plant-based milk
- 2-6 tbsp raw ceremonial grade cacao (recommend grating the cacao past)
- 1 tsp honey or maple syrup (optional)
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- A pinch of cayenne (optional for warmth)
- A pinch of cardamom (optional for taste and carminative/digestive properties)

#### **Instructions:**

Heat the liquid, cacao, and optional spices on a low heat, slowly to allow cacao to melt.  
Whisk in sweetener, and spices.  
Stir well and enjoy warm.

#### **2. Cacao Energy Bites: Ingredients:**

- 1 cup dates (pitted)
- 1/2 cup raw cacao powder
- 1/2 cup nuts (almonds or walnuts)
- 1 tbsp coconut oil
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- A pinch of sea salt

#### **Instructions:**

Blend all ingredients in a food processor until a sticky dough forms.  
Roll into small balls and refrigerate for 30 minutes.  
Store in an airtight container and enjoy as a nutritious snack.

#### **3. Cacao Smoothie: Ingredients:**

- 1 banana
- 1 tbsp raw cacao powder
- 1 cup plant-based milk
- 1 tbsp almond butter
- 1 tsp chia seeds
- Ice cubes (optional)

#### **Instructions:**

Blend all ingredients until smooth.

Pour into a glass and enjoy!

Preparation and Dosage:

Raw Cacao Powder: 1–2 tablespoons daily in drinks or food.

Cacao Nibs: 1–2 tablespoons eaten as a snack or added to meals.

Cacao Tincture: 2–4 mL daily.

### **Safety and Precautions:**

Excessive consumption may cause jitteriness or digestive discomfort due to theobromine and caffeine.

Avoid in individuals sensitive to stimulants or with heart conditions.

May interact with medications, including MAO inhibitors and blood pressure medications.

### **Sustainability and Ethical Considerations:**

Cacao production has significant social and environmental impacts. Look for fair-trade, organic sources to support ethical harvesting and sustainable farming practices.

- Ethical, organic, and fair trade cacao sources

○

### **Contraindications:**

Not recommended for individuals with caffeine sensitivity or those on stimulant-restricting medications

Should be consumed in moderation by individuals with acid reflux.

### **Conclusion:**

Cacao (*Theobroma cacao*) is a revered botanical with both medicinal and culinary significance. Its rich nutritional profile supports cardiovascular health, cognitive function, and overall well-being. By incorporating cacao mindfully, one can enjoy its many benefits while respecting its cultural and ecological significance.

### **References**

- Keith's Cacao. [www.keithscacao.com](http://www.keithscacao.com)