

# Ceremonial Cacao Considerations

Cacao is a plant medicine. Like any potent medicine, it is important to be mindful in its use so that we get the most benefit.

In most cases, there are no concerns to be aware of. Drinking cacao is akin to eating dark chocolate. The considerations listed below mainly come into play in higher doses, like when we have the ceremonial drink. In these cases, the combination of potent cacao and a higher dose warrants some additional mindfulness.

Cacao is a strong bitter and stimulant, so there are some potential side effects to be aware of, as well as certain specific contra-indications. Since cacao is consumed in higher doses in ceremony, people might experience symptoms such as being lightheaded, sweaty palms, headache or nausea. Simply slow down, drink water and practice self-care as needed until symptoms subside. Cacao can also stimulant detox symptoms in some cases. If this happens, take it as a blessing and drink plenty of water as your body lets go of whatever it didn't like. this

**Certain anti-depressants are worth extra consideration.** MAOI based anti-depressants are contraindicated with the tyramine in chocolate, so a larger dose of cacao is not recommended. MAOI based anti-depressants are first generation anti-depressants and are less common these days. People taking them are on a restricted diet that includes limiting or avoiding chocolate, so they should know if they can consume or not. Side effects could include more serious headache and nausea, so make sure to check medications first.

Additionally, there has been some concern with larger doses of cacao and SSRI type anti-depressants, because of the MAOI's in cacao. Specifically, the tryptophan, a type of MAOI which is a pre-cursor to serotonin has been cited by some as a possible contraindication. The research about this interaction is minimal, but studies on both the amounts of tryptophan in chocolate and how that might cause 'serotonin syndrome' don't indicate any problem. However, to be on the safe side, for those on SSRI's, I suggest consulting with your doctor and/or pharmacist regarding higher doses of cacao.

**Serious heart conditions.** The theobromine in cacao increases heart rate significantly and is a vasodilator, lowering blood pressure. If you have such a condition, consider consulting a physician and certainly go lighter on the amount.

**Pregnancy & breastfeeding.** Like coffee or tea, it is important to reduce the intake of stimulating foods. The theobromine in cacao, which is very similar to caffeine, has a stimulating effect. Thus I recommend using a lower dosage.

**Pure cacao can be fatal to dogs** (and possibly horses and parrots) so be sure to keep it away from pets.

If any symptoms do present, drink lots of water, get some rest and it will pass.