The “Egg-ceptional” Egg

By Dr. Ramona Warren

Historically, eggs have tended to be “one of those foods” – the type to incite controversy. One week you read the comments of an expert espousing the health benefits of eggs, while another week a critic claims eggs raise cholesterol. Numerous conflicting opinions on each side of the debate can leave the consumer scratching her head wondering, “Are eggs good for me, bad for me, or somewhere in between?”

Fear of eggs began in the 1960s, when doctors began advising patients to avoid foods high in cholesterol, as studies linked elevated cholesterol to heart disease. People were told to limit cholesterol consumption from food to 300mg or less. Since the average egg contains 213mg of cholesterol, a single egg accounted for over two-thirds of the recommended dietary allowance. Eggs became Public Enemy No. 1. People began eating egg whites only (in order to avoid the yolk and its cholesterol) and opting for egg substitutes (a processed food).

But as the years wore on, research began proving some of the original cholesterol assumptions false. Studies began to show that the cholesterol we eat has very little effect on cholesterol levels in our blood. This is because the body makes cholesterol on its own. The liver makes about 75 percent of the body’s cholesterol. When you decrease dietary cholesterol, the body increases its production of cholesterol. In fact, studies found that when cholesterol and saturated fat was decreased in the diet, the incidence of heart disease actually *increased*.

The truth is, consuming up to one egg a day, on average, can actually be good for your health and is recommended by many nutritionists due to the egg’s excellent nutritional profile.

Eggs contain every single B vitamin, including riboflavin and B12. They contain a complete range of amino acids, making eggs a complete protein. Eggs are also an excellent source of other nutrients such as iodine, selenium, choline, biotin, phosphorus, and are one of the few foods rich in vitamin D.

What’s more, eggs are low in calories. A large egg averages only 75 calories, contains no carbohydrates or sugars, and has only 5 grams of fat. According to the World Health Organization, eggs provide the highest quality protein of any food available. A single egg contains 7 grams of protein, with almost half the protein being found in the yolk.

While many people choose to eat only the whites so they can increase protein without too much fat or cholesterol, most of the nutrients are found in the yolk, which accounts for over 80% of the egg’s nutritional value. Nutrients found in the yolk help with proper brain function and eye health. The yolk also contains important fatty acids that improve the body’s healing capabilities and provide necessary nutrients for healthy skin and hair. So, it is important to eat the whole egg, not just the egg white, in order to gain the most nutritional benefit.

When shopping for eggs, it’s important to note that not all eggs are created equal. With so many egg choices available, which is the healthiest option?

Buying eggs from local farmers is the best way to find the most nutritious eggs. These eggs are typically organic and free range or “pastured.” An organic egg comes from a chicken fed only organic food, free from pesticides and genetically-modified grains. The chicken should also be able to go outdoors and eat a diet natural to chickens.

In contrast, many commercially-raised, so-called “free-range” chickens are not raised outdoors, don’t forage freely for their food and are not fed a quality diet. Regulations allow commercial growers to call chickens “free-range” or “cage-free” as long as they are not confined to a single cage. However, these chickens are frequently raised in a large chicken house, with thousands of other chickens, in horrible conditions, and typically fed diets of genetically modified grains and antibiotics.

Additionally, commercial eggs (including organic ones) are cleaned in chemical baths to disinfect them before they are put into egg cartons. Oftentimes these chemicals reach the inside of the egg, since the shell of the egg is very porous.

One of the simplest ways to determine the quality of an egg is to look at the yolk. Usually a darker, deeper orange colored yolk is an indication of a more nutritious egg. A chicken that has been commercially raised and fed a poor quality diet will have a paler yellow yolk.

We are fortunate to have several local farmers in the area that offer quality eggs. Harvest Moon Farm in Buckhead is one of the closest local farms that has high-quality, free-range, organic eggs available. Ripe Thing Market in Greensboro is another source for quality local eggs.

**TOP EIGHT REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD EAT MORE EGGS**

1. The 2015 Dietary Guidelines just released by the US Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS) have eliminated warnings about dietary cholesterol, which for decades has been wrongfully blamed for causing heart disease. These latest guidelines accurately state that there is no such link. According to the report, “cholesterol is not a nutrient of concern for overconsumption." Translation: You can eat eggs without fear of raising your blood serum cholesterol (sugar and trans fats are what raise serum cholesterol). Translation: Don’t eat cake, Eat eggs instead ☺).
2. According to the Journal of Nutrition and Food Science, eggs are low in calories, a rich source of protein, and are packed with nutrients essential to good health, particularly vitamin D, vitamin B12, selenium and choline. In addition, eggs contain a rich mix of essential amino acids.
3. The high levels of antioxidants found in eggs mean they could help prevent age-related macular degeneration - a leading cause of blindness.
4. Dr Carrie Ruxton, an independent dietitian and lead author of the Journal of Nutrition and Food Science report, said: 'The health benefits of eggs would appear to be so great that it's perhaps no exaggeration to call them a superfood - they are one of the most nutrient-dense foods available.”
5. According to research from Purdue University, adding eggs to a salad with a variety of raw vegetables is an effective method to improve the absorption of carotenoids, which are fat-soluble nutrients that help reduce inflammation and oxidative stress.
6. Research has shown that for older adults, high-quality protein such as that found in eggs may prevent the degeneration of skeletal muscle and protect against some of the health risks associated with ageing.
7. A breakfast super food, organic, pastured eggs have been shown to prevent cancer, and they contain a plethora of amino acids such as tryptophan and tyrosine – both important precursors to brain chemicals and essential neurotransmitters.
8. Eggs are inexpensive, versatile, easy to prepare, and enormously GOOD FOR YOU!

**NOT ALL EGGS ARE CREATED EQUAL!** The kind of eggs you eat are very important. Buy local, farm fresh eggs from free-range, pastured chickens whose diet is supplemented only with a certified non-GMO feed. All supermarket eggs, including organic, are dipped in chemical disinfecting baths which, due to the egg’s porous shell, pass into the egg. By the time those eggs reach the supermarket, they’re most likely several weeks old. Unless they’re labeled organic, supermarket eggs are from chickens fed GMO grain. Organic does NOT mean the chickens are pastured or free-range or cage-free: it only means they’re fed organic grain. Eggs from factory-farmed chickens are tainted with all the GMO’s and antibiotics the hens eat/are given.

***Harvest Moon Garden & Orchard, LLC eggs are from our pastured, free range, cage free chickens that are fed from our chemical free garden and eat certified non-GMO feed.***

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