

Good Eggs: For Nutrition, They're Hard to Beat

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The egg is no longer a nutritional no-no

What would we do without the egg? It's a dietary mainstay, not only for [breakfast](#) but to feed finicky kids, stand in for a quick lunch or supper, blend raw into holiday nogs, and as an ingredient in all kinds of sweet and savory dishes.

But for a few decades there, eggs had a rather unwholesome reputation. Thanks to its [high cholesterol](#) content, the egg was deemed villainous. Years went by while many of us shunned eggs, ate only the whites, or ventured into the world of egg substitutes.

Then, in 2000, the American Heart Association (AHA) revised its dietary guidelines and gave healthy adults the green light to enjoy eggs once again. The AHA's guidelines now allow an egg a day for healthy adults while still advising a total daily [cholesterol](#) limit of 300 mg.

The confusion over eggs stems from their cholesterol content. One large egg contains 213 mg of cholesterol, accounting for two-thirds of the recommended daily limit.

When scientists learned that high blood cholesterol was associated with [heart disease](#), foods high in cholesterol logically became suspect. But after 25 years of study, it has become evident that cholesterol in food is not the culprit -- saturated fat has a much bigger effect on blood cholesterol. Full-fat dairy products and fatty meats are examples of foods that are loaded with saturated fat and which trigger the body to produce cholesterol.

Let Us Eat Eggs

With science on our side, we can once again enjoy the wonderfully nutritious egg. Along with milk, eggs contain the highest biological value (or gold standard) for protein. One egg has only 75 calories but 7 grams of high-quality protein, 5 grams of fat, and 1.6 grams of saturated fat, along with iron, [vitamins](#), minerals, and carotenoids. But the full health benefits of eggs can only be realized if you store them properly -- in the refrigerator -- and cook them thoroughly to kill any potential bacteria.

Creating Designer Eggs

Not all eggs are created equally. Manufacturers and chicken farmers have taken steps to enhance eggs' nutritional properties, spawning an entire industry devoted to improving the dietary quality of the egg.

"Designer" eggs may come from chickens that are allowed to roam freely (free range) or whose feed is supplemented with omega-3 fatty acids. Hens given feed that is free of animal products

produce vegetarian eggs, while those given all-organic feed produce organic eggs.

Some chicken feed is enriched with canola oil, bran, kelp, flaxseed, marine algae, fish oil, or vitamin E to increase the eggs' healthy omega-3 fatty acid content. Certain types of feed are designed to reduce the saturated and total fat content of the egg yolk. Marigold extract has been used to increase the lutein content of eggs.

Beyond nutrition, other specialty eggs use a pasteurization process that heats the egg just enough to kill bacteria without affecting the texture of the raw product.

A Satisfying Source of Protein

Another good reason to eat eggs is that they help keep you feeling full. An egg, a few slices of whole-grain toast, and half a grapefruit is a low-calorie breakfast that will keep you satisfied until lunch. As you face the challenge of losing weight, it's important to eat foods that are naturally nutrient-rich and stave off hunger between meals. The egg is an "eggcellent" example.

Eggs are easy to eat, well-tolerated by young and old, adaptable to any meal, and inexpensive. Whether you prefer designer or generic eggs, manage your egg intake over the course of a week. On days when you enjoy eggs for breakfast, it's wise to limit foods high in cholesterol and saturated fat for the rest of the day.

Of course, it's a good idea to know your blood cholesterol level and talk with your physician about the cholesterol and saturated fat content of your eating plan. People with high cholesterol levels should follow their doctor's advice about eating eggs.