

FACT SHEET 3

AN EGG A DAY IS NOW OK!



When it comes to eggs, nature has provided us with one of the most conveniently packaged, highly nutritious wonder foods. Eggs contain one of the highest sources of available protein of any natural food, providing all the amino acids needed for growth and repairing the body. They are also a rich source of iron (especially important for women and babies), Phosphorus, Vitamin B12 and Folate and contain a broad range of other nutrients as listed in the table below.

Eggs are easy to prepare and store, making them a great convenience food for everyone - including vegetarians. Eggs were once wrongly portrayed as contributing to people's blood cholesterol levels - a perception, which has been scratched following further research into the real causes of high cholesterol levels.

No link between eggs and heart disease

Reassuringly, one of the biggest health studies ever conducted internationally by the Harvard School of Public Health found no relationship between egg consumption and heart disease in a population of more than 100,000 men and women. The study compared those who consumed less than one egg a week and those who ate more than one egg a day (or at least 7 eggs a week!) proving eggs were clearly not the culprit in heart disease. Yet another Australian study of post-menopausal women found no correlation between eating eggs and total dietary cholesterol intake.

Interestingly, three of the highest egg consuming countries in the world, Japan, Spain and France also have the lowest rates of heart disease, which lends further support to the argument of adding eggs to the diet instead of leaving them out.

NUTRITIONAL PROFILE OF A 50G EGG

NUTRIENT	AMOUNT	NUTRIENT	AMOUNT
Energy	297kJ	Zinc	0.5mg
Protein	6.3g	Phosphorus	109mg
Fat	5.0g	Vitamin A	144µg
Carbohydrate, total	0.2g	Thiamin (vitamin B1)	0.04mg
-sugars	0.2g	Riboflavin (vitamin B2)	0.21mg
Cholesterol	185mg	Niacin (vitamin B3)	1.0mg
Sodium	66mg	Folate	12.4µg
Potassium	57mg	Vitamin B12	0.5µg
Iron	0.8mg	Vitamin E	0.8mg

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The link between Fat and Cholesterol

This is where things get confusing, and is why eggs were unfairly maligned when the focus on heart disease was on dietary cholesterol. The emphasis has now shifted to the amount of saturated fats in the diet. Eggs are a relatively low fat food and contain mostly the 'healthy' polyunsaturated and monounsaturated types. For example, one 50 gram egg provides just 5 grams of fat (the equivalent of one teaspoon). Of this, two thirds is polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat.

As can be seen from the table, a typical 50g egg provides around 185mg of cholesterol. As health authorities generally recommend cholesterol from foods be kept to less than 300mg daily, **an egg a day is OK** for most people as part of an overall healthy eating pattern, which includes plenty of fruit, vegetables, wholegrain breads and cereals and moderate amounts of low fat dairy products and lean meats.

(Saturated fat is found in full cream dairy products, fatty meats, pastries, biscuits, cakes, fried takeaway foods and butter, and these foods should be kept to a minimum or replaced with a healthy alternative).

Cholesterol from food and blood cholesterol levels

Research shows that some people absorb more cholesterol than others and are, therefore, more susceptible to changes in their diet. However, what is consistently shown is that saturated fat increases blood cholesterol levels to a much greater extent than the direct intake of dietary sources of cholesterol. So, when it comes to following a heart-healthy eating plan, it is more important to cut down on saturated fats than to worry about the cholesterol that may be found in lower fat foods such as eggs and some seafood.

Eggs are actually the **'good guys'** in terms of their contribution towards fats, saturated fat and cholesterol in the diet - just take it easy on the amount of bacon and dripping in the frypan and consider an alternate cooking method!

How many eggs can I eat?

If you have a relatively normal cholesterol level then an egg a day is OK. If your cholesterol level is already elevated, most nutritionists would probably advise you to stick to around three to four eggs a week, but more importantly, make sure your overall diet is low in saturated fat. As the fat is contained in the yolk, an omelette of two egg whites and one egg yolk will give you all the protein without any unnecessary fat. Chances are many people are eating far fewer eggs than they should be and would be better off dropping out high saturated fats from other sources and eating more eggs instead.

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FOOD	FAT (grams)	SATURATED fat(g)	CHOLESTEROL (mg)	RECOMMENDATION
Egg, 1	5	1.9	185	An egg a day is OK!
Salami, 30g (6 slices)	12	4	35	Keep to a minimum to reduce saturated fat intake.
Prawns, 5 king size	1	0	150	Enjoy when eating out or barbecued. Very low in fat.
Milk, 1 cup, full cream	10	6	34	Choose low fat varieties instead.
Cheese, 40g	14	9	40	Choose low fat varieties instead.
Danish pastries	16	9	35	Keep to special occasions only.
Pizza, 2 slices	22	9	25	Enjoy occasionally.

How to incorporate eggs into a heart healthy eating plan

Eggs are one of the most versatile foods you can cook as they can be boiled, poached, scrambled or mixed with other ingredients to make frittatas, omelettes or salads. They are also easy to store and can be eaten either hot or cold once cooked. About the only thing eggs don't contain is Vitamin C, so why not enjoy your eggs for breakfast with wholegrain toast, grilled tomatoes and a glass of orange juice?

Eggs just keep on getting smarter

Consumers are set to benefit even more from new research that aims to make eggs 'smarter' by increasing their already high nutritional value. Research recently funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation aims to find ways of increasing the amount of two nutrients in eggs: iron and an essential fatty acid called Arachidonic Acid, which is of essential nutritional benefit to infants when used in baby formula, while the importance of iron in the diet is well known, especially in adolescent and pregnant women and sportspeople. Results recently highlighted the nutritional contribution to infant brain development of Omega 3 enriched eggs that have led to eggs being described as the 'wonder food for babies'.

For further information you can visit the website of the Australian Egg Industry Association at <http://www.aeia.org> where you will find links to the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation's egg program and the International Egg Nutrition Centre.

The best way to store eggs

The best place to store eggs is in their carton in the fridge. Cartons reduce water loss and help prevent flavours from other foods being absorbed into the eggs. On average, eggs will stay fresh for four weeks if refrigerated, or refer to the 'best before' date on the carton.



