Egg Facts

The Good News for Egg Lovers

More Australians are taking an interest in nutrition and health than ever before. Knowledge in nutrition is continually improving with research being conducted at many centres and it is not uncommon for new research findings on foods to contradict older information. Eggs - once thought to be a harmful cholesterol-raising food have now been found to have no effect on people with normal blood cholesterol levels.

# Why are eggs a good food?

* **High in Protein**: Eggs have the ideal protein mix for growth and repair
* **Low in fat:** A medium egg has less than five grams of fat and is not high in kilojoules
* **Low in saturated fat:** Eggs have less than 2 grams saturated fat.
* **Rich in vitamins:** Eggs really are nature's vitamin capsule containing all the vitamins except vitamin C. They are a good source of vitamin B12 which may be lacking in vegetarian diets
* **Rich in Iron:** Iron is best absorbed from food when Vitamin C is also present so combine your egg with a glass of orange juice for even better nutrition
* Eating 2 eggs per day will not increase LDL (bad) blood cholesterol for people with a normal blood cholesterol level
* Eggs are an ideal food as an alternative to meat
* Eggs are very economical and nutritious
* Reducing saturated fat is far more important than dietary cholesterol reduction

# Myths about Eggs

Eggs and Cholesterol - Until recently it was thought that cholesterol in food was an important factor in high blood cholesterol. We now know that dietary cholesterol alone is not significant for most people. The body produces cholesterol in the liver especially when the diet is high in saturated fat. Research done at the CSIRO's Division of Human Nutrition has shown that cholesterol in diet is far less important than many people think. The research showed that adding two eggs a day to the diet of people with normal cholesterol levels produced no rise in the level of LDL (or bad) cholesterol. Even at three eggs a day, the effect on blood cholesterol was equivalent to eating a pat (10g) of butter or 30g of cheese. So, if saturated fat and not cholesterol is the most important dietary contributor to heart disease shouldn't you be taking advantage of the benefits of eggs?

Eggs and Fat - Saturated fat from food is the main culprit when it comes to managing blood cholesterol levels. When too much saturated fat is consumed, the body has more trouble balancing the correct amount of cholesterol in the bloodstream. This means that blood cholesterol levels can rise. Healthy fats on the other hand, can help the body remove cholesterol from the bloodstream. These types of fat are good to eat regularly. Healthy fats are called polyunsaturated and monounsaturated and they're found in oils like olive, canola, peanut, sunflower and soybean oil. They are also found in avocadoes, nuts, seeds and fish. It may surprise you to know that of the moderate amount of fat found in eggs, 70% is the healthy type! The good news about eggs and cholesterol means they can be enjoyed regularly as part of a healthy eating pattern. Recent research shows regular egg consumption has other health benefits such as superior nutrient intakes.

## Eggs are an excellent source of protein

Proteins are made up of smaller units called amino acids. All the amino acids that are essential for humans are found in eggs in such ideal proportions that egg protein is used as the standard against which all other protein foods are rated.

Protein is essential for building new cells to replace those damaged during the normal wear and tear of living. During times of growth protein requirements are especially high, so children, teenagers, pregnant and lactating women have the greatest needs.

One egg supplies 6 grams of excellent quality protein. That’s as much protein as you’d find in 35 grams of cottage cheese or 180 ml of milk.

## Eggs supply valuable iron

Iron is a mineral needed for making red blood cells. Insufficient iron causes anaemia, a common condition in women and teenage girls since their requirements for iron are so high. Eggs are a good source of iron. Each egg yolk provides 1.2 mg of iron – as much as a lamb chop or 4 dried apricot halves. Iron is best absorbed when a food containing vitamin C is eaten at the same meal. So remember to have a small glass of fruit juice or some type of fruit or vegetable at the same meal as your egg and you’ll absorb the iron more efficiently.

## Eggs contain a wonderful range of vitamins

The vitamins found in eggs include vitamins A, D and E and every one of the B complex vitamins (thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, B6, B12, folic acid, pantothenic acid and biotin). The only vitamin missing is vitamin C, found in fruits and vegetables. Eggs are a particularly valuable source of vitamin B12 – a vitamin which may be lacking in vegetarian diets. Vitamins A, D and E are found only in the egg yolk; most of the B group vitamins are found in both white and yolk, although generally in greater quantities in the yolk.

Eating a large number of raw eggs at one time is inadvisable since a natural substance called avidin stops the vitamin, biotin, from being absorbed. When cooked, the avidin in eggs is destroyed.

## Eggs are also a source of minerals

If you were crazy enough to eat the shell of an egg it would provide a good dose of calcium. However, other important minerals such as potassium, iron, phosphorus, iodine and zinc are more conveniently supplied by eating the yolk and the white of the egg.

## Eggs provide only 2.4% of the fat in the australian diet

Eggs play only a minor role in the high fat diet consumed by Australians. Each egg contributes approximately 5 grams of fat – that’s about as much fat as you get from one mouthful of a sausage.

## A high proportion of the fat in eggs is unsaturated

Fats come in three major types: saturated, mono-unsaturated and polyunsaturated. These terms refer to the chemical structure of the fats. Saturated fats can be converted into cholesterol in the blood while some polyunsaturated fats can help lower high levels of fats in the blood. Mono-unsaturated fats do not alter the level of cholesterol in the blood and people who use a lot of this type of fat have little heart disease.

In an egg, 38% of the fat is saturated. 47% is mono-saturated and 11% is a valuable type of polyunsaturated fat, called linoleic acid. There are also small quantities of other polyunsaturated fats present. Eggs, like most other foods should be eaten in moderation. If you have relatively normal cholesterol levels then an egg a day is ok.

## Eggs provide virtually no carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are an essential part of a well-balanced diet. Since eggs have almost no carbohydrate, they should be consumed at the same meal as breads or cereals or fruits or vegetables – all important sources of valuable carbohydrates.

## Eggs are low in kilojoules

An average-sized egg has only about 312 kilojoules – about the same number as an apple, a thin slice of cheese or half a small container of natural yoghurt. That makes eggs an ideal food for slimmers.

## The cholesterol in an egg is found only in the yolk

Like all foods of animal origin, eggs contain cholesterol. This is an essential substance in the body, a vital part of the wall of all body cells. Cholesterol is also used by the body to produce some of its hormones.

Cholesterol comes in ready-made foods and is also made within the body from saturated fats in foods. Unfortunately some people’s bodies make too much cholesterol from the saturated fats and this excess can accumulate in the arteries. Some types of dietary fibre may prevent this occurring.

An egg contains about 185mg of cholesterol, all in the yolk. Recent research suggests that cholesterol in foods will not cause problems if the diet is low in fat. Current recommendations in the Dietary Guidelines for Australians suggest everyone should avoid eating too much fat. So in a healthy low fat diet, moderate consumption of eggs should cause no problems.

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