

Health Panel Lauds Nutritional Value of Eggs, Notes New Research on Dietary Cholesterol

By ACSH Staff — August 1, 2002

Eggs play a valuable role in helping consumers achieve a balanced, varied, and nutritious diet, the American Council on Science and Health concluded in a report released today.

"When people hear the word 'eggs,' they often think 'cholesterol' and 'bad,'" says Dr. Ruth Kava, ACSH's director of nutrition. "In fact," she continues, "although egg yolks are high in cholesterol, they only contribute about 1/3 of the typical American's dietary cholesterol. Eggs also provide essential nutrients, such as protein, riboflavin, folate, and vitamins B12, D and E."

Recent research shows that the most potent dietary culprits for raising levels of cholesterol in the blood are the saturated fats in foods, not the cholesterol. Major studies indicate that dietary cholesterol has only a small effect on blood levels of cholesterol for most people. Indeed, little if any relationship exists between egg consumption and heart disease risk for healthy people.

Since moderation is the key to good nutrition, eating great quantities of eggs or any other food isn't a good idea. But abstaining from eggs is also unwise, since it means missing out on eggs' positive aspects: the variety they add to the diet, their high nutrient value, their easy digestibility, their low cost, their convenience, and their usefulness in recipes.

People with high serum cholesterol levels who are sensitive to dietary cholesterol may need to strictly limit their egg yolk consumption so they don't exceed the current Recommended Daily Value of 300 milligrams. But most other people don't have to be so strictly attentive to dietary cholesterol levels.

Another concern about eggs is the possibility that they might be contaminated with *Salmonella enteritidis*, a bacterium that can cause gastrointestinal illness. But fortunately, only a small percentage (about 1 in 20,000) of the eggs produced in the U.S. run the risk of being contaminated from the hens that lay them.

People with weakened immunity, such as the elderly or persons with AIDS, must be especially vigilant against foodborne bacterial contamination. These vulnerable people should always take care to cook eggs completely. They should also consider using pasteurized eggs or egg substitutes, which have been treated to kill disease-causing microbes.

"Eggs are a valuable component of the American diet, and it would be unfortunate if consumers avoided them because of unwarranted fears," says Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, president of ACSH. "Thorough cooking will eliminate bacteria, and most people can eat eggs without worrying that their blood cholesterol levels will be affected."

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