



Q & A Eggs and the Heart

Q: What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that is a type of lipid. It forms part of cell membranes and is used in the formation of brain cells, nerve cells, bile acids, preformed Vitamin D and hormones.

There are two types of cholesterol – that made by our bodies or recycled by our liver (blood cholesterol), and the cholesterol found in the food we eat (dietary cholesterol). While some cholesterol in our body is essential, the type and amount of cholesterol in our blood correlates with the risk of heart disease.

Q: Don't eggs have cholesterol and isn't that bad for people with heart disease?

Evidence suggests eggs have only a very small effect on blood cholesterol levels, especially at normal levels of intake. While egg yolks are high in cholesterol and are a major source of dietary cholesterol, it is saturated fatty acids that have a greater effect on blood cholesterol levels and, therefore, your risk of heart disease.

Q: Are eggs good for me?

Yes. Eggs are a nutritious whole food that can be part of a heart-healthy dietary pattern. They are an inexpensive source of protein and other nutrients such as carotenoids, vitamin D, B12, selenium and choline.

However, it is important to pay special attention to the foods you eat alongside your eggs, such as white bread, butter, salt, and/or processed meats, like bacon or sausages, which are not so good for our hearts.

A heart-healthy dietary pattern is based largely on minimally processed foods and is high in vegetables and fruit. It also includes some whole grains (in place of refined grains), legumes, nuts, seeds and other sources of healthy fats such as oily fish, and can contain non-processed meats or poultry and/or dairy.

Q: What do the new recommendations say?

Based on current evidence, the Heart Foundation is recommending that New Zealanders at increased risk of heart disease, including those with type 2 diabetes, can eat up to six eggs per week as part of a heart-healthy diet. This amount is unlikely to have any substantive influence on their risk of developing heart disease.

For the general healthy population, eggs can be included as part of a heart-healthy eating pattern. There are more important changes people should be focusing on, such as increasing vegetable intake, eating more whole and less-processed foods and reducing saturated fat intake, rather than restricting egg intake.

Q: Why have the recommendations changed?

Science is a constantly evolving process, and we continue to learn more about the impact of food on health all the time. Since the Heart Foundation's original position paper was published in 1999, most organisations around the world have relaxed their advice on eggs, based on the current available scientific evidence.

Last year, the Heart Foundation commissioned an independent review of the existing research. This review found the evidence was not strong enough to continue recommendations to limit egg intake to three per week. It also found that for people at risk of heart disease, eating up to six eggs per week as part of a heart-healthy diet was unlikely to have any substantive influence on heart disease risk.



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Q: Do some people respond differently to different levels of egg intake?

Yes, there are large differences in cholesterol absorption between people, and differences by age and sex. Some people, known as hyper-responders, have a greater response to dietary cholesterol intake than others.

Advice for hyper-responders would be best based on their individual response to egg intake, as limits will vary according to the individual. It would be best to discuss your individual requirements with your GP and a registered dietitian.

Q: What if I have type 2 diabetes? How many eggs can I have?

Dietary cholesterol and egg intake have been associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease in people with type 2 diabetes. The Heart Foundation recommends that New Zealanders at increased risk of heart disease, including those with type 2 diabetes, can eat up to six eggs per week as part of a heart-healthy diet.

Q: What is the best way to prepare my eggs?

As part of a heart-healthy dietary pattern, it is recommended that eggs are either boiled, poached or scrambled, without using butter. It is also important to pay special attention to the foods you eat alongside your eggs. Typically, these foods may include refined white bread, butter, salt, and/or processed meats, like bacon or sausages, which are not so good for our hearts.