



Patient Information

Eggs: Big Nutrition in a Small Package

The Atkins diet, the Zone diet and the South Beach diet are low- or complex-carbohydrate diets that are changing the way we eat. These diets promote limiting your daily intake of simple, processed or total carbohydrates and increasing your intake of protein. Examples of approved foods are lean meats, eggs and cheeses. Whether you are on a low-carb diet or not, read on to find out why eggs are a good source of nutrition.

The Nutritional Lowdown

Eggs are a nutrient-dense food, which means that they provide a high proportion of daily nutrient needs while accounting for a small proportion of daily calorie needs. One large egg has only about 75 calories, yet eggs are an excellent source of high-quality protein and contain at least 13 vitamins and minerals. In fact, eggs are one of few foods that are natural sources of vitamin D.

Besides being a source of nutrition for people of all ages, eggs are inexpensive, convenient and easy to prepare. Shell color has nothing to do with the nutritional value, quality or flavor of the egg. Different breeds of hens simply lay different colored eggs.

Protein

A large egg provides 6 grams of protein, which is 10% of the daily value based on a 2,000-calorie diet. Because of its high amount of protein, eggs are classified in the Food Guide Pyramid in a category with meat, poultry, fish, dry beans and nuts. However, eggs are lower in cost and calories than many of the other animal-protein foods from the same group. Egg protein is the standard by which the biological value of other proteins is measured and provides the optimal mixture of essential amino acids.

Fat and Cholesterol

One large egg contains 4.5 grams of total fat — 1.5 grams of saturated fat, 0.5 grams of polyunsaturated fat and 2.0 grams of monounsaturated fat. An egg's saturated fat content is relatively low compared with its calorie content.

One large egg contains 213 milligrams of cholesterol, 71% of the recommended daily value of 300 milligrams. This doesn't mean

eggs aren't acceptable in a person's diet; just make sure your overall diet is otherwise low in cholesterol.

Folate

Folate, a B vitamin that is necessary for cell division and producing new blood cells, is found naturally in eggs, with one large egg containing 6% of the daily value of folate based on a 2,000-calorie diet. This is especially important for women who are pregnant or who are trying to conceive. Folate helps prevent neural tube birth defects and decreases the risk of low birthweight babies.

Lutein and Zeaxanthin

Occurring mostly in people 50 and older, age-related macular degeneration (ARMD) is the leading cause of blindness in the elderly. The disease occurs when the macula of the retina deteriorates, affecting central vision. Lutein and zeaxanthin, antioxidants that together make up the pigment of the eye, can reduce risk of ARMD.

A study that analyzed egg yolks, 33 types of fruits and vegetables and two fruit juices showed that egg yolks had the most lutein and zeaxanthin of all food and juice sources.

The Yolk and the White

The yellow portion of an egg, or yolk, contains more vitamins and minerals than the white does. All of the egg's vitamins A, D and E and zinc are found in the yolk. The yolk has more phosphorus, folate, manganese, thiamin, iron, iodine, copper and calcium than the white does. All the fat and cholesterol and 44% of the protein in an egg are found in the yolk.

An egg white contains more than half of an egg's protein, riboflavin and niacin. Also found primarily in the white are the egg's chlorine, magnesium, potassium, sodium and sulfur.

Storage and Preparation Tips

Make sure you handle your eggs with care. Store eggs in the refrigerator until you are ready to use them — and don't forget to cook them thoroughly! But don't ruin eggs' nutritional value with extra-fat cooking. Try poaching eggs instead of frying them, or use nonstick pans or nonstick vegetable pan sprays during preparation.

For more information, consult the following: Eggs are okay, every day. Nutrition Realities [newsletter]. Washington, DC: Egg Nutrition Center; summer 1999; available online at: <http://www.enc-online.org/NRv3n2.pdf>; and the nutrition label for eggs, available online at: <http://www.aeb.org/food/nutrition.html>.

Additional Notes:
