

## Can eating eggs affect your cholesterol?

Scientific studies show little to link eggs with blood cholesterol.

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The lingering myth that there is a link between eggs, bad cholesterol and heart disease needs to be unscrambled once and for all, say experts. Many people, including health professionals, still mistakenly believe the link exists. But this view harks back to the 1970s, according to New Zealand Nutrition Foundation CEO Sarah Hanrahan. Hanrahan says it is rare for a single food to be responsible for any disease process: "But for some reason that myth has hung around, especially for older people."



She says robust scientific evidence<sup>[1]</sup> in recent years has proven otherwise and shows an increased intake of dietary cholesterol (including from eggs) has little or no effect on blood cholesterol levels. Studies carried out on healthy people found no effect of daily egg intake on blood cholesterol levels<sup>[2,3,4]</sup>. Saturated fat was found to have more impact on blood cholesterol levels than dietary cholesterol<sup>[5]</sup>. And a 2015 meta-analysis and systematic review found no association between increased intake of dietary cholesterol and increased risk of heart disease or stroke<sup>[6]</sup>. The Heart Foundation NZ recommends that people with an increased risk of heart disease and Type 2 diabetes can eat up to six<sup>[7]</sup> eggs per week as part of a heart-healthy diet. The foundation says people who are hyperresponders to dietary cholesterol should consult their healthcare provider to discuss their egg intake. For the general (healthy) population, it doesn't make any recommendations around limiting egg intake if they are consumed as part of a heart-healthy diet. It also notes saturated fatty acids have a greater effect on blood cholesterol levels and therefore the risk of heart disease.

People need to look at overall diet

The foundation's chief advisor food & nutrition Dave Munro says a person's overall diet is important.

"People should in general be eating more plant-based foods like vegetables, healthy fats such as avocado, olive oil, nuts and seeds, and cutting back on highly processed foods," he says. Munro says eggs are a nutritious, versatile whole food and one of several great sources of protein in a balanced and varied diet. They can be eaten at breakfast, lunch or dinner, can be boiled, scrambled or poached, and combined with vegetables in frittatas and omelettes. "It's important to pay attention to what you're eating your eggs with and limiting, for example, bacon and other processed meats." When making its recommendations

around eggs, the Heart Foundation looked at all evidence to inform its recommendations. “Science is a constantly evolving process, and we continue to learn more about the impact of food on health all the time,” Monro says. “It’s important for us to constantly review our recommendations but be guided by what the totality of the evidence is saying, instead of the results of a single study.” Eggs are also a great source of protein, which is particularly important for older people who need to have protein spread evenly throughout the day and Hanrahan says eggs are a great way to achieve that.

The Ministry of Health also gives eggs the thumbs up. Its Eating and Activity Guidelines state that eggs are a healthy, natural whole food and can be eaten by most people every day of the week[8].

“The reality is that eggs are incredibly nutritious, versatile, and affordable,” she says. Anyone concerned about their diet and cholesterol issues should consult with their health-care professional, GP or dietician.

This story was originally published in NZ Doctor

Useful links:

The 2021 Everybody Patient Information Sheet has more information on cholesterol.

[www.nzdoctor.co.nz/everybody-patientsheets](http://www.nzdoctor.co.nz/everybody-patientsheets)

Eating healthy doesn’t mean food has to be boring. For new recipe ideas and inspiration visit [eggs.org.nz/lite-n-healthy/](http://eggs.org.nz/lite-n-healthy/) [www.health.govt.nz/our-work/eating-andactivity-guidelines](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/eating-andactivity-guidelines)