

## IFAS Extension

### Protein-Rich Eggs Are A Perfect Food

Tallahassee Democrat

Rebecca Moore, Extension Agent, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service—Family & Consumer Sciences

The egg hunt may be over, but eggs still need to be included as a safe and nutritious part of your diet. Eggs are one of nature's most perfect foods, containing all the protein, vitamins (except vitamin C) and minerals essential for good health. Unfortunately, eggs have gotten some bad press over the years, but maybe the following will help clear up any questions you might have about eggs.

1. Aren't Eggs High In Cholesterol? Yes, eggs have 213 mg of cholesterol per egg (which is contained in the yolk), but they only contain 1.5 g of saturated fat. The most current research shows that eating foods with saturated fat will significantly increase blood cholesterol more than dietary cholesterol for most people. Thanks to newer research the American Heart Association has changed their former guidelines of eating eggs three times a week, to permitting an egg a day!
2. Aren't Eggs A Food Safety Risk Due To Salmonella? Eggs, like other potentially hazardous foods, need to be handled properly in order to prevent food borne illness. Salmonella comes in contact with the outside of the egg because the egg exits the hen's body through the same passageway as their feces. Bacteria also may be present inside the egg in the ovary or oviduct before the shell forms around the egg. This is why it is important to cook and handle eggs safely.
3. When Is It Risky To Eat Raw Eggs? It is always risky to eat raw eggs for the reason listed in #2. Traditional recipes using raw eggs (like home made ice cream, meringue, French Silk Pie, Caesar Salad, etc.) need to substitute pasteurized eggs. While anyone who eats raw or undercooked eggs takes the risk of getting a food borne illness. The elderly, the very young, pregnant women (the unborn child is at risk), and people with lowered immune systems are most at risk.
4. What Should You Consider When Buying Eggs? Never purchase eggs that are not in refrigeration. Carefully examine the eggs before you purchase them to make sure they are clean and free of cracks. Egg grading is done by the USDA and is a voluntary service. The egg packers have to pay for the service if they want a grade on their eggs. The consumer grades for eggs are grades A, AA, and B. The quality of the interior of the egg and the appearance and condition of the shell determine the grade. Size does not affect the grade. The date on a carton of eggs is the date that the eggs were washed, graded, and packed in the carton. Sometimes there is also a "sell-by" date on the carton. This date is usually three to five weeks after the "pack" date. If there is no "sell-by" date, use the eggs within five weeks of the pack date.
5. What Do You Need To Do To Keep Eggs Safe? First, keep eggs refrigerated. *Salmonella*, the bacteria associated with eggs, will grow rapidly if held in a temperature above 41°F. Therefore, eggs should be refrigerated to prevent the rapid growth of bacteria. Eggs are washed and sanitized before they are packed. They are also coated with a thin layer of mineral oil to protect the egg. It is not necessary to wash eggs because washing them will remove the protective coating. This makes it possible for bacteria to pass through the shell and into the egg. You should wash your hands, equipment, utensils, and work surfaces before and after working with eggs with hot, soapy water. Eggs should not be out of refrigeration for more than 2 hours. Recipes containing eggs should be cooked to at least 160°F. Fried eggs should be cooked until the yolk and white are firm. Scrambled eggs should be cooked until they are no longer runny. Pasteurized shell eggs should be used in recipes that call for raw or undercooked eggs.

Eggs are an excellent source of protein and substitute for meat. The average American needs only 5-6 ounces of meat/protein per day. One egg is an equivalent of one ounce of lean meat/protein according to MyPyramid developed by USDA. Be sure to include eggs as a healthy choice in your diet.