



Member Article - July 2015

Eggs & Cholesterol: Good or Bad?

Submitted by Dr. Ira Chislof



Chislof Chiropractic & Wellness Center

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Cholesterol, commonly thought to be a huge contributing factor to heart attacks, has become the food version of the black plague. Many have chosen to limit daily cholesterol by restricting their egg intake, eating only egg whites or cutting eggs out of the diet entirely. However, just cutting dietary cholesterol may not be as effective at deterring heart attacks as previously thought.

Information from a recent study by Walter Willett, chair of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health's Nutrition Department suggests that cholesterol may not be as bad as everyone thinks.

The distinction lies in what type of cholesterol you are ingesting. "We have to be careful distinguishing dietary cholesterol from cholesterol in the blood. They're related, but only weakly, and this new report is about dietary cholesterol," Willett said.

Most of the current information on the harmful effects of cholesterol comes from the Framingham Heart Study. Their conclusion was that high blood levels of cholesterol is a major predictive factor of heart disease. Essentially any cholesterol we eat will raise our blood cholesterol which clogs the arteries and leads to heart attacks.

However, Willett's research shows that the relationship between the cholesterol we eat and the cholesterol in our blood is more

complicated than that. "The relationship between cholesterol in the diet and cholesterol in the blood is quite weak. If you raise dietary cholesterol by about 100 percent, you may just get a 10 percent rise in blood cholesterol. So it's not at all a one-to-one relationship."

Blood cholesterol is much more complex than total cholesterol and there is a good kind and a bad kind. The bad cholesterol contributes to heart disease but the good cholesterol helps reduce the risk. Willett's study focused on people who ate more eggs, a food naturally high in cholesterol. He concluded that the additional dietary intake of cholesterol did not actually increase the risk of a heart attack. The amount of cholesterol in eggs, Willett says, is about the size of a pea. Additionally, eggs have lots of other vitamins and minerals that add nutritional value and offset the cholesterol. It is important to note, however, that consuming many eggs as a diabetic can increase the risk of heart disease.

While eating a diet high in cholesterol still may not be completely healthy, you can safely add delicious, free-range eggs back into your diet. Eating a varied diet with plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains is always a safe choice combined with exercise and preventive care.

Source: Harvard Gazette, <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2015/02/the-entire-egg/>