



# Position Statement for Healthcare Professionals

## *How Many Eggs?*

*Updated April 2016*

Eggs are a nutrient dense whole food that can make an important contribution to a healthy eating pattern. Many people believe a certain number of eggs to be healthy to include in the diet and as a result, a question often fielded by health professionals is 'how many eggs can be included each week as part of a healthy eating pattern?'

In the 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines, eggs are included in the lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legume/beans group as a meat alternative<sup>1</sup>. The recommended serves of this group for children and adults is 1-3 serves a day depending on age and sex. During pregnancy, 3-4 serves a day are recommended to provide additional iron and zinc. Examples of a serve includes: 2 large eggs, 80g cooked chicken, 65g cooked lean meat or 100g cooked fish. There are no specific recommendations on the frequency of egg intake within the Dietary Guidelines however they do indicate there is no reason that eggs can not be consumed every day as part of a healthy diet. The Guidelines also state there is recent evidence to suggest consumption of eggs every day is not associated with increased risk of coronary heart disease.

### **Australian healthy eating guideline recommendations**

### **National Heart Foundation (NHF) recommendations**

The NHF 2009 Position Statement on Dietary Fats and Dietary Sterols for Cardiovascular Health <sup>2</sup> states saturated fatty acid intake is associated with CHD, and that dietary cholesterol increases total cholesterol and LDL-C but substantially less so than saturated and trans fatty acids. In this position statement it is recommended that all Australians may consume six eggs per week within a cardio-protective, reduced saturated fat eating pattern without increasing their risk of CVD.

The most recent guidelines from the NHF regarding the management of heart disease risk were released in 2012. Both reports mention eggs as a food to be included in an overall diet to manage and/or reduce the risk of heart disease. The NHF's, *Guidelines for the management of absolute cardiovascular disease risk report*, provides general lifestyle advice to those at higher absolute risk of CVD and includes the following advice on diet: "Consume a varied diet rich in vegetables, fruits, wholegrain cereals, lean meat, poultry, fish, **eggs**, nuts and seeds, legumes and beans, and low-fat dairy products". Other advice includes limiting foods containing saturated and trans fat but there is no mention of a recommendation to limit dietary cholesterol intake<sup>3</sup>. In the *Reducing risk in heart disease (An expert guide to clinical practice for secondary prevention of coronary heart disease)*<sup>4</sup> report, as part of the nutrition advice section health professionals are advised to:

- Advise patients to consume > 2 g ALA per day by including canola- or soybean-based oils and margarine spreads, seeds (especially linseeds), nuts (particularly walnuts), legumes (including soybeans), **eggs** and green leafy vegetables.



## **International recommendations**

International healthy eating guidelines such as 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans<sup>5</sup>, Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating<sup>6</sup> and the 2011 UK Government's Eatwell Plate do not impose a restriction on the intake of eggs. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans were revised in 2015 and no longer contain the recommendation to limit dietary cholesterol intake which had been included in past revisions.

The latest American Heart Association (AHA) guidelines<sup>7</sup> no longer include a specific limit on dietary cholesterol intake to reduce CVD risk. The focus of the diet recommendations within these guidelines include: limiting saturated and trans fat, consuming adequate energy (kilojoules) for individual requirements, limiting intake of sweets, sugar-sweetened beverages and red meat.

## **The nutritional contribution of eggs**

Eggs are a nutrient rich food being a natural source of at least 11 different vitamins and minerals, plus the antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin, and long chain omega-3 fatty acids. Eggs provide 59% of the RDI for selenium, 49% RDI for folate, 42% RDI for pantothenic acid, 40% RDI for vitamin B12, 32% RDI for vitamin A, 29% RDI for iodine and riboflavin, 24% RDI for vitamin E and 21% RDI for phosphorus. Other nutrients for which eggs contribute more than 10% of the RDI include iron (14%) and thiamin (11%). Eggs are also rich in long-chain omega-3 fatty acids, providing 71% of the adequate intake (AI) for men and 127% AI for women.

The protein found in eggs is also considered to be of the highest quality. Eggs are particularly important for people following a restricted diet or for those who have increased nutrient requirements, such as ovo-vegetarians, pregnant women, children, adolescents and the elderly.

Overall, the 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines state there is no reason that eggs can not be consumed every day<sup>1</sup> and highlight the lack of scientific data suggesting egg consumption needs to be restricted in a healthy eating pattern. The Egg Nutrition Council supports the inclusion of eggs daily as part of a healthy diet. Eggs are a highly nutritious food that can play an important role in a healthy diet and are recommended as part of a healthy eating pattern that also includes wholegrain breads and cereals, fruits, vegetables, low fat dairy foods, lean meat, fish and poultry and unsaturated fats.

This statement is for healthcare professionals only.

*\*One serve = 2x60g eggs (104g edible portion)*

### **Useful links:**

2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines

[www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines)

National Heart Foundation of Australia

[www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au)



## References:

1. National Health and Medical Research Council. Australian Dietary Guidelines. (ed. National Health and Medical Research Council) (NHMRC, Canberra, ACT, Australia, 2013).
2. National Heart Foundation of Australia. Position statement. Dietary fats and dietary sterols for cardiovascular health. (2009).
3. National Vascular Disease Prevention Alliance. Guidelines for the management of absolute cardiovascular disease risk. (National Stroke Foundation, Melbourne, VIC, Australia, 2012).
4. National Heart Foundation of Australia. Reducing risk in heart disease - an expert guide to clinical practice for secondary prevention of coronary heart disease. (NHF, Sydney, NSW, Australia, 2012).
5. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015- 2020: Eighth Edition. (eds. Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, *et al.*) (America, December 2015 ).
6. Health Canada. Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide. (2007).
7. Wenger, N.K. Prevention of cardiovascular disease: highlights for the clinician of the 2013 American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association guidelines. *Clin Cardiol* **37**, 239-251 (2014).