

PENNY SAVER NEWS

May 23, 2013

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Eggs vs. Cholesterol

For years now the media reports have been doing the flip-flop over eggs. They're good protein. They raise our cholesterol. They're inexpensive. They might raise our risk of heart attacks. But they're my breakfast! Please, make up your mind! Here's the current knowledge.

Most of the studies over the last 20 years have found *that eating eggs does not raise our blood cholesterol*, or our risk of heart attacks or strokes! These studies have included over 100,000 people. In them, people ate as many as 4 to 6 eggs a day, and still there was no connection to stroke, heart attacks or heart disease.

The one group of people whose cholesterol does seem to be affected by the cholesterol in eggs is those persons who have diabetes. Diabetes affects not only our blood sugar but also our bodies' ability to manage cholesterol. So these people probably should limit how many eggs they eat.

As for the rest of us, *how we cook* our eggs makes a much bigger difference in our health. Most of the cholesterol in our blood is homemade, by our own livers, from the saturated fat we eat. Saturated fat is mostly solid fats, that is things like butter, lard, the fat on steaks or chicken. Hard margarine is also mostly saturated fat. Bacon grease is solid fat. That's why how we cook eggs makes a big difference. Reducing the amount of fats, particularly solid fats, will help lower our risk. If your doctor told you to limit your cholesterol or egg intake, do so. But limit the sat fat too!

Other foods in our diets can also make a difference in our blood cholesterol levels. Liquid fats, the mono- or poly-unsaturated oils, can help lower cholesterol levels. These include most vegetable oils, but especially walnut, corn and sunflower oils for poly-unsaturated fats. Mono-unsaturated fats that are also good include olive, canola and safflower oils.

Eating plenty of soluble fiber will help lower cholesterol. These fibers tie up cholesterol and related acids in our gut so that we can't absorb them. Oatmeal and oat bran are excellent soluble fibers. So is barley, which can be used in just about any dish that would use rice. And psyllium fiber, found in various fiber supplements, is also a soluble fiber that's effective at lowering cholesterol.

Fish with lots of omega-3 fats are also recommended for lowering cholesterol levels. The best are salmon and mackerel, but trout and tuna have some too. Chicken and even shrimp have a little omega-3. There is a different kind of omega-3 fat in flax and walnuts. This kind has very little effect on cholesterol, although it does seem to help reduce inflammation.

Finally, margarines and some fruit juices that are fortified with plant sterols or stanols are good choices for lowering cholesterol. These sterols and stanols are made by plants. They are similar to cholesterol, but not the same. In our guts they work to keep us from absorbing cholesterol from our food. The trick with these is that you need to use them every day. And you need to eat enough of them to block the cholesterol. Many people on low-fat diets won't eat enough of them to get the most benefit. But if you use butter or margarine regularly, then read labels and choose these. And stay away from any that show trans-fats on the label!

Of course there are other good foods that can help. But these all ready mentioned are the most effective. Eating plenty of beans and using mostly whole grains will help. Both groups have fiber, it's just not the most effective kind of fiber. A little red wine or 100% purple grape juice helps many people too. And a little, just a little, dark chocolate a day, may also help. Manage your diet, and avoid the pills!

These quesadillas are quick, easy and ready for breakfast on the go. Just wrap each one in waxed paper to carry along. If you want, instead of 6 eggs you can use 4 eggs plus 4 egg whites. Adjust the heat of the salsa to match your taste buds!

Breakfast Quesadillas

1 cup (4 oz) reduced fat pepper jack cheese 6 8-inch whole wheat flour tortillas
¼ cup sliced green onions 6 eggs
½ cup salsa, hot, medium or mild

Lay tortillas out on plates and divide the cheese over them, putting it on just one half of each tortilla. Coat a large skillet with cooking spray. Heat to medium hot. Beat eggs in bowl with fork then stir in green onions. Pour into heated skillet. As eggs begin to set pull across the skillet with an inverted turner. Don't keep stirring, just pull gently to make big, soft fluffy curds. Keep cooking and turning until no liquid remains. Divide eggs over the tortillas on top of cheese. Fold tortillas in half. Wipe skillet clean. Put tortillas in skillet 1 or 2 at a time and toast just until cheese melts, 1 to 2 minutes per side. Cut into wedges and top with salsa. Serves 6.

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