Activity 24

EGGS AND NUTRITION

Read the following passage.

Nutritional facts about eggs

Eggs are an excellent source of protein

Protein is essential for building new cells to replace those damaged during the normal wear and tear of living. During times of growth protein requirements are especially high, so children, teenagers, pregnant and lactating women have the greatest needs.

One egg supplies 6 grams of excellent quality protein. That's as much protein as you'd find in 35 grams of cottage cheese or 180 mL of milk.

Eggs supply valuable iron

Iron is a mineral needed for making red blood cells. Insufficient iron causes anaemia—a common condition in women and teenage girls since their requirements for iron are so high.

Eggs are a good source of iron. Each egg yolk provides 1.2 mg of iron—as much as a lamb chop or 4 dried apricot halves.

Eggs contain a wonderful range of vitamins

The vitamins found in eggs include vitamins A, D and E and every one of the B complex vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, B6, B12, folic acid, pantothenic acid and biotin). The only vitamin missing is vitamin C, found in fruits and vegetables. Eggs are a particularly valuable source of vitamin B12—a vitamin which may be lacking in vegetarian diets.

Eggs are also a source of minerals

If you were crazy enough to eat the shell of an egg it would provide a good dose of calcium. However, other important minerals such as potassium, iron, phosphorus, iodine and zinc are more conveniently supplied by eating the yolk and the white of the egg.

A high proportion of the fat in eggs is unsaturated

Fats come in three major types: saturated, mono-unsaturated and polyunsaturated. These terms refer to the chemical structure of the fats. Saturated fats can be converted into cholesterol in the blood while some polyunsaturated fats can help lower high levels of fats in the blood. Mono-unsaturated fats do not alter the level of cholesterol in the blood and people who use a lot of this type of fat have little heart disease.

In an egg, 38% of the fat is saturated. 47% is mono-unsaturated and 11% is a valuable type of polyunsaturated fat, called linoleic acid. There are also small quantities of other polyunsaturated fats present. Eggs, like most other foods, should be eaten in moderation.

Eggs provide virtually no carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are an essential part of a well-balanced diet. Since eggs have almost no carbohydrate, they should be consumed at the same meal as breads or cereals or fruits or vegetables—all important sources of valuable carbohydrates.

Eggs are low in kilojoules

An average-sized egg has only about 335 kilojoules—about the same number as an apple, a thin slice of cheese or half a small container of natural yoghurt. That makes eggs an ideal food for slimmers.

The cholesterol in an egg is found only in the yolk

Like all foods of animal origin, eggs contain cholesterol. This is an essential substance in the body, a vital part of the wall of all body cells. Cholesterol is also used by the body to produce some of its hormones.

Cholesterol comes ready-made in foods and is also made within the body from saturated fats in foods. Unfortunately some people's bodies make too much cholesterol from the saturated fats and this excess can accumulate in the arteries. Some types of dietary fibre may prevent this occurring.

An egg contains about 225 mg of cholesterol, all in the yolk. Recent research suggests that cholesterol in foods will not cause problems if the diet is low in fat. Current recommendations in the Dietary Guidelines for Australians suggest everyone should avoid eating too much fat. So in a healthy low fat diet, moderate consumption of eggs should cause no problems.

Summarise the value and problem of eggs in our diet. You might like to follow up the issue of fat and cholesterol.