

# Eggs Shift from Health Risk to Recommendation

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New evidence presented last month at a meeting of the Royal Society of Medicines Food & Health Forum, confirms that British eggs have moved decisively from the category of health risk to dietary recommendation, with Edwina Currie joining leading nutrition experts in a change of advice.

The experts explained that, with British eggs no longer linked to salmonella or heart disease, and with changes to hen feeding practices producing healthier eggs, new advice is that vulnerable groups that previously were told to avoid eggs should now be encouraged to eat them due to their enviable nutritional profile. Scientific research has demonstrated specific benefits for pregnant women, young children and the elderly.

And 25 years after Edwina Currie's statement claiming "most of the egg production in this country, sadly, is now infected with salmonella", she says that "you can have your soft-boiled egg today in Britain, provided its got a little Lion on it, it's safe".

The British Lion scheme, introduced in 1998, ten years after the salmonella crisis, made hen vaccination against salmonella compulsory and ensured eggs were produced to the highest standards of food safety. The Lion scheme has effectively eliminated salmonella from British Lion eggs and, with egg sales increasing by around 15% in the last 5 years\*, the rise looks set to continue as awareness of their nutritional benefits builds.

## Changed practices

New data presented at the Royal Society of Medicine shows that as well as the food safety improvements, changing hen feeding practices have also made a significant mark on the nutritional composition of eggs. Eggs have been tested from all production methods in the first full update since the 1980s and findings show that eggs now contain 20% less fat, more than 20% less saturated fat and around 13% fewer calories. They also contain more than 70% more vitamin D as well as double the amount of selenium. Eggs have now also been recognised as a significant source of choline and omega 3 fatty acids. The changes have been attributed to feed changes and improved analytical methods - meat and bone meal in hens' feed has been replaced by soya, the hens now also receive higher levels of vitamin supplementation and the use of enzymes now aids feed digestion.

Two decades before the salmonella crisis, eggs had started to decline in popularity when some health experts linked eggs to heart disease risk. In recent years this link has been disproven with an ever increasing body of evidence showing that dietary cholesterol, in foods such as eggs and prawns, produces no clinically significant effect on blood cholesterol level or risk of cardiovascular disease.

## Concerns have been overcome

Allergy risk has provided another question mark over eggs for many people, but evidence presented at the Royal Society of Medicine suggests that high maternal exposure to eggs during pregnancy may be a better strategy than avoidance and that delaying the introduction of potential allergenic foods like eggs may increase allergy risk.

The Royal Society of Medicine meeting was presented with research demonstrating that eggs have a specific role to play at different life stages to benefit health. As a weaning food eggs contain vitamins A and D, phosphorus and omega-3 fatty acids, essential for healthy growth and development. Obesity is a growing concern, especially for those in midlife, and emerging evidence suggests because eggs can help you feel fuller for longer they could play a role in

weight control. In later life eggs can help combat malnutrition and sarcopenia, loss of muscle mass and strength, and the associated health risks. Food intake falls between the ages of 40 and 70 and a nutrient dense food, like eggs, can play a key role in achieving a healthy diet, the leucine and vitamin D that eggs contain can also help in the treatment of sarcopenia.

Professor Bruce Griffin, chair of the Royal Society of Medicine meeting said: "This event aims to look at the myths surrounding eggs, including why they were historically linked to increased heart disease risk, the facts about egg allergy, and the food safety concerns that have been overcome. The meeting also examined the evidence in support of the recommendation to include eggs as a valuable part of a healthy diet."