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## Cracking Open Some Myths About Eggs

Ah April! For many of us, the month brings memories of dyeing eggs and Easter egg hunts. This year, many of the eggs being dyed across the Treasure State come from the most productive chickens in the country. According to US Department of Agriculture (USDA) 2009 data, Montana led the nation in average number of eggs produced per layer at 305, 14 percent above the national average of 268 eggs per layer.

“With all the interest in local foods, it’s good to know that our chickens are so productive,” says Lynn Paul, PhD, RD (registered dietitian), Food and Nutrition Specialist with MSU Extension in Bozeman. “Enjoying a few more eggs from a local producer may be a good thing for the health of Montana families. Sadly, a few long-held nutrition myths have kept many folks from enjoying the benefits of versatile, nutrient-rich eggs.”

For forty years, eggs have been burdened with a bad reputation based on cholesterol. While one yolk does contain 210 milligrams of dietary cholesterol, eggs do not raise the blood cholesterol levels of most people. Large studies from several countries have found no link between egg consumption and heart disease or stroke. Some egg nutrients, like B-vitamins, may even promote heart health. Current guidelines suggest that healthy people can eat one to two eggs daily, if they keep their fat and saturated fat intake at moderate levels. If cholesterol must be limited, two egg whites can be substituted for one whole egg in most recipes.

According to Dr. Paul, eggs provide nutrition that is important for good health at all ages, from pregnancy through old age. “Eggs are an excellent source of choline, which is critical for fetal brain development and helps prevent birth defects. They also contain lutein and zeaxanthin, two nutrients that help reduce the risk of both cataracts and age-related macular degeneration.” Additionally, eggs are an inexpensive source of high quality protein, which helps promote healthy weights and strong muscles for everybody.

There are some other egg myths that deserve to get cracked adds Dr. Paul. Here are a few egg-related facts that are important whether you get your eggs from the backyard, grocery store, or local farmers’ market:

- **Brown eggs are not more nutritious than white eggs.** Different breeds of chickens lay different colored eggs; some are even blue and green. The yellow color of egg yolks varies with what chickens eat.
- **Organic eggs do not have more nutrients than conventionally produced eggs.** However, some people prefer to support organic and free-range production techniques on large farms and in small backyards.
- **“Designer” eggs rarely provide enough extra nutrients to be worth their extra cost.** Eggs that claim to be rich in omega-3s, for example, contain only a small amount compared to fatty fish, such as salmon.

“Eggs are one of the quickest and least expensive protein foods to prepare at home,” notes Paul. “They can be fried, scrambled, boiled, poached, and baked. Simple omelets and open-faced frittatas are also deliciously easy ways to combine Montana-made low-fat cheeses, herbs, vegetables, and lean proteins with eggs.”

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