

Eggs: A Good Source of Choline

» Why Your Body Needs This Nutrient

Choline is an essential nutrient your body needs for cells to function normally. Although choline was discovered in 1862, it wasn't identified as an essential nutrient for human health until just 10 years ago.

Evolving research is providing more details about the benefits of choline, which also is important for proper liver, brain and nerve function, as well as for memory and for transporting nutrients through the body. Unfortunately, studies have shown that most Americans are not getting enough choline in their diet.

Choline Intake

In fact, one recent study reported that choline intake by older children, men, women and pregnant women is far below established adequate intake (AI) levels.

Researchers found that just 10% or less of these age groups are eating close to their AI level of choline.

Recommended levels of choline for adults are 425 mg/day for women and 550 mg/day for men. Infants, children and adolescents need anywhere from 125 mg/day to 550 mg/day, depending on age and gender. See below for more information about AI levels for pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding.

Your liver can make some of its own choline, but not enough to meet your body's needs. The good news is that you can eat foods high in choline to increase your intake of this substance.

Food Sources of Choline

Eggs are considered an excellent source of choline, meaning they contain at least 110 mg of choline per serving. Other excellent sources are beef liver, chicken liver and wheat germ.

One serving of eggs contains about 250 mg of choline. For instance, two large eggs would provide 56% of the AI for a pregnant woman. One serving of eggs is considered to be two large eggs.

It is important to know that all the choline in eggs is contained in the yolk. If you eat only egg whites, you are not getting some of the most important nutrients in eggs. In addition to choline, the yolk contains 40% of the egg's protein and two nutrients that help promote eye health: lutein and zeaxanthin.

Moms and Babies Need Choline

The recommended intake of choline is higher for some women. Women who are pregnant should ingest 450 mg/day, and women who are breastfeeding should get 550 mg/day. This is because high levels of choline are transferred from mother to baby. When women are pregnant, choline is transferred to the fetus, and when women are breastfeeding, choline is transferred to the baby through breast milk.

Breastfeeding mothers also need extra choline because it is necessary for milk production.

Research also shows that choline intake is important for healthy infant development. For example, women whose diets didn't have enough choline during pregnancy have a greater risk for their babies to have a neural tube defect, such as spina bifida. This risk is increased even if the woman got enough other nutrients that help prevent birth defects, such as folic acid.

Other research suggests that choline is important for brain development in infants. Research also suggests that choline affects the parts of the brain responsible for memory function and lifelong learning ability.

Choline Helps Your Heart

Choline also is good for your body because it plays an important role in breaking down homocysteine, which is an amino acid that the body releases when it digests protein. High levels of homocysteine harm your health. Specifically, too much of this amino acid increases your risk of heart disease and stroke.

High levels of homocysteine can cause blood to clot too easily. When this happens, there is an increased risk of your blood vessels being blocked — possibly leading to a stroke or heart attack. In addition, too much homocysteine means that blood vessels absorb low-density lipoprotein (LDL) — the "bad" cholesterol — more easily, which can lead to hardened arteries.

Research shows that a lack of choline in the body results in an increased level of homocysteine.

The good news is that choline can be obtained in the diet through a popular food: eggs. Although eggs do contain cholesterol, studies show that healthy adults are able to eat eggs without a significant impact on their cholesterol levels or heart disease risk. NP

Additional Notes:
