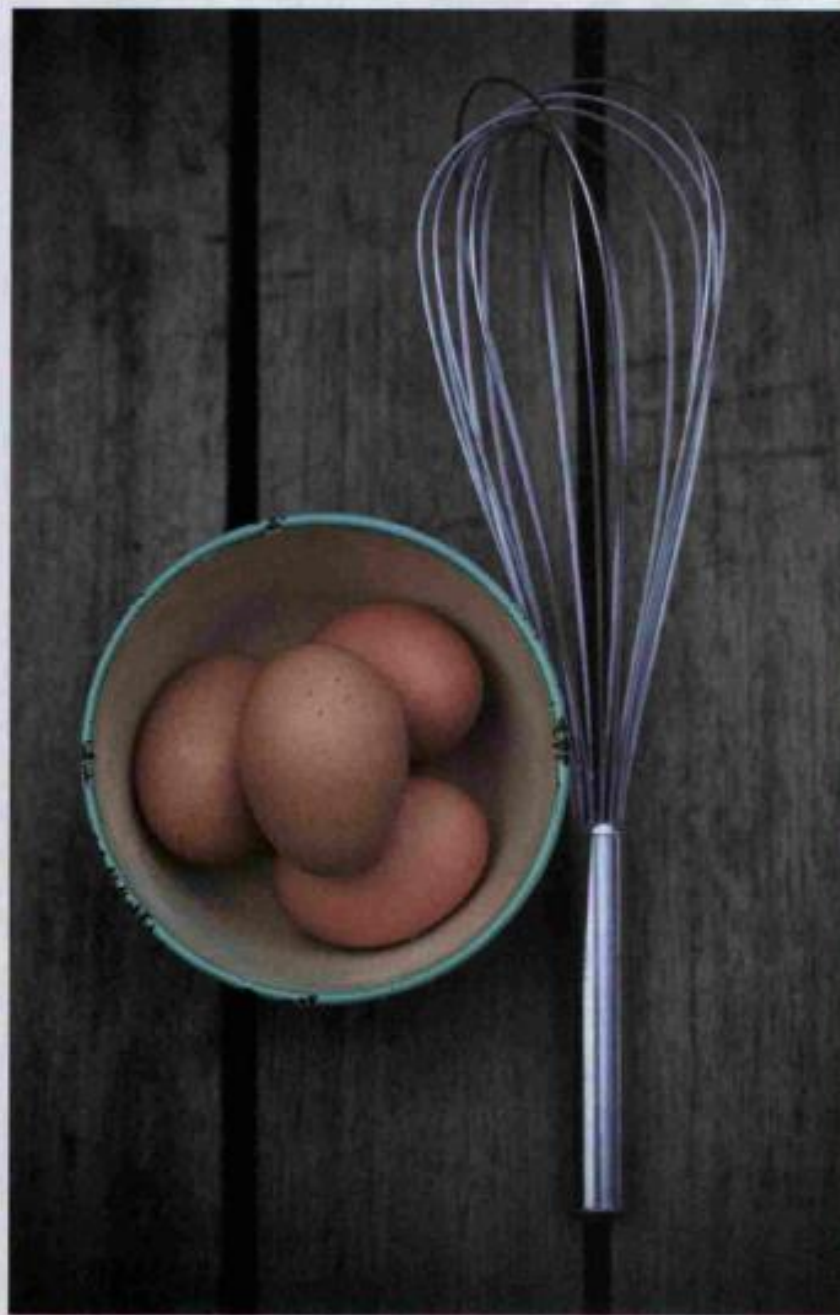


Triathlete



Get Cracking With Eggs

BY PIP TAYLOR

When the words “athlete” and “eggs” are uttered in the same sentence the typical image conjured up is that of a bodybuilder downing copious amounts of raw eggs à la Rocky. You don’t think of a skinny runner or a triathlete. And certainly while the myth that overloading on protein, including eggs by the dozen, will make you big and strong endures,

scientific studies show that eggs may in fact be the endurance athlete’s secret, making valuable contributions to energy, strength and power.

Eggs have had a bad rap in the past, being blamed for high cholesterol and listed as a food to be avoided or at best limited. But they are emerging now from that shadow with research concluding that diets high in saturated fats,

such as in the accompanying bacon, are to blame for rising cholesterol levels rather than foods that contain dietary cholesterol. Eggs are low in saturated fats, containing mostly healthy mono- and poly-unsaturated fats, which means that unless you are one of the few people who are genetically cholesterol sensitive, an egg or two a day is fine.

Aside from all the wonderful things that eggs are essential for—cakes, real mayonnaise, crème brûlée, quiches, muffins, pasta carbonara, tiramisu (OK so most of those are not low in saturated fats so you do want to limit them)—they are one of the most convenient and versatile ingredients when it comes to preparing something quick and healthy. They can be scrambled, steamed, fried, poached, boiled, baked, paired with any number of other ingredients and eaten at any time of the day. A baked frittata is one of my favorites; it serves as a satisfying dinner or lunch, there are endless variations and its leftovers the next day are almost as good.

Eggs are also extremely nutritious. In fact, they are the highest quality protein food, the gold standard against which all other food is measured. Protein quality is based on the amino acid composition of a food as well as the digestibility of that protein, which is how much of that protein can be actually used and retained by body tissues. Eggs contain all essential amino acids and are rich in vitamins, minerals, omega-3 fats and antioxidants. The amino acid leucine not only regulates muscle protein synthesis and is crucial for recovery, but it also plays an important role in how muscles utilize glucose for energy.

Eggs get even more points for energy production in that they are rich in B vitamins, thiamin, folate and riboflavin. And the protein content also means that eggs have high satiety value, keeping you fuller for longer. Hunger control and satiety are important for the endurance athlete looking to optimize lean body composition.

Many people tend to eat just the whites and throw away the yolks in an attempt to cut fat and calories. The yolk is, in fact, the major source of the nutrients and a good deal of the protein, and although the yolk is the portion of the egg that contains the fat, those fats are the healthy omega-3 fats. So instead of cutting out the nutritious yolks, cut back on saturated fats in other areas instead, such as by not buttering the bread you have your whole poached egg with, skipping the bacon and using a non-stick pan when frying. Eat the whole egg instead.

As an important side note, there are many different types of eggs >>>continued on pg. 122

NUTRITION Q&A

COOKING TIP:

I love a poached egg on whole grain toast, perhaps with a little grilled or roasted tomato or avocado and smoked salmon—or all three if I want to feel really spoiled. Poaching is one of the healthiest ways to prepare eggs, and you can make them soft and runny or firm, according to your preference. A really easy, if not all that traditional, way to poach lots of eggs at once is to drape some heat-proof plastic wrap over a small cup or ramekin dish, making sure it creates a hollow. Crack an egg into this, twisting the plastic wrap to enclose the egg, and carefully place it into the simmering water to poach. Depending on how you like your egg, leave it in the gently simmering water for about three to four minutes.



available for purchase—free-range, organic, cage free or battery farmed. If you have ever seen how a confined battery hen is raised and kept, then you would have no hesitation in paying a couple more cents for your morning egg. If you haven't, and the environmental or animal liberation message is not one you care to hear, then perhaps the revelation that certified free-range eggs are nutritionally superior (studies show lower saturated fat and higher levels of some nutrients) than those of caged hens will help sway you. It's worthwhile to pay a little extra, even if you are on a strict budget. Instead, buy the more expensive eggs and put one fewer into that breakfast omelet.

Eggs' unique mix of amino acids, fats and essential vitamins and minerals mean that they punch above their weight nutritionally, making significant contributions to energy production, muscle synthesis and recovery, as well as other crucial functions, including eye and brain health. Plus, they are readily available, relatively cheap and quick and easy to prepare—the essential ingredient for every kitchen and the perfect food for the endurance athlete. ▾

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