

The worst way to eat eggs

By Jean-Marc Dupuis

The story of mad cow disease and 'animal meal' has so disgusted people that even chickens are now labelled 'grain-fed', as if this were a guarantee of quality.

But you, dear reader, who had grandparents in the country, or who had 'lessons in things' at primary school, know that the chicken has never been a vegetarian animal, and even less a consumer of corn!

The chicken's favourite snack is a plump worm. Give her the rind of your ham and she'll be in heaven!

If you give her the freedom to do so, your hen will spend her day scratching the ground for maggots and insects. If she doesn't find any, she will peck at grasses, green plants, small shoots, roots and, only occasionally, seeds.

That's what a hen needs to be happy, healthy and make good eggs. But for this to happen, she must have the opportunity to go out!

Factory "free range" chickens

The art of marketing is to play with expressions that deceive the consumer without appearing to do so.

So, in the supermarket, you have noticed that you can buy 'free range' eggs. On the packaging, there is a picture of a beautiful red hen pecking away in a meadow of green, fat grass on a sunny day.

However, here is what the legislation requires in order to be entitled to the "free-range" label: *"During the day, access to an outdoor run mostly covered with vegetation (4 m² of land per hen)"*.

Well, I claim that only the marketing expert will detect the trap hidden under this formula.

The beginner, even if suspicious, will be concerned that the hen has access not to a grassy meadow, but to a simple "field" covered "for the most part" by vegetation, the rest being rubble or concrete.

He will be right to worry about that. But in reality, the real trap is in the expression "access to an outdoor course".

Imagine a 150-metre long corrugated iron shed, filled with thousands of chickens packed like sardines. The smell is sickening. The noise is deafening. The hens are in such a state of stress and aggression that they are constantly drooling, plucking feathers, poking their eyes and scratching themselves. Some have broken limbs. You cannot venture into this shed without special protection.

On the wall of this shed, three removable plates of 40 cm on each side, flush with the ground, which are removed every morning by the farmer. Well, that's it: that's enough for the hens to be declared as having "access" to an "outdoor run"!

Technically, one could imagine that a certain number of hens would, in fact, go outside. The problem is that, as the chicks were born in closed sheds, they have never seen daylight and are afraid to go outside! Despite the "access" to the outside, it is possible that the vast majority of "free-range" hens will never dare to go outside.

Eating organic eggs?

Since 2004, all eggs sold in the trade have been compulsorily coded. A small stamp is applied to each egg, including a number:

- 3: Caged hens, to be avoided at all costs.
- 2: Chickens raised on the ground, in a shed without seeing the sky once in their miserable existence. Also to be avoided.
- 1: Free range hens, we have seen what this means. To be avoided.
- 0: organic egg. The hens were allowed to go outside, they were given shelter and vegetation on the outside run; inside the shed, the number of hens is limited, with a lower density; finally, they were given at least 90% organic feed.

I'm sorry to disappoint you, but for me, the number 0 is not enough. More and more industrial plants are being developed that meet organic criteria on paper and produce eggs by the millions.

This is a far cry from traditional chicken farming, which is the only way to guarantee the genuine egg that our grandparents used to produce, and which can be recognised among thousands on the plate. In 1950, France had millions of working farms. In each of them there was a henhouse with a few dozen hens, which were often free to roam around. All the eggs consumed in this country were produced in this way.

The only good way to produce eggs is this way. This means that you should ideally buy your eggs from an organic farmer you know, who does indeed run a full-size chicken farm. Visit a farm near you, if you live in the countryside: the farmer will gladly show you around, if he has nothing to hide.

A good chicken farmer will monitor the feed of his chickens, make sure that they have fresh and clean water, enough space, good ventilation in the coop. The house should be cleaned very regularly.

Well cared for hens will lay eggs with a dark yolk. Thanks to their good

The fresher the eggs, the more viscous the white. The fresher the eggs, the more viscous the white.

The best way to eat your eggs.

Now that you've bought real eggs, how do you prepare them to retain all their nutritional value?

The worst way to eat eggs is to do what happens in action movies where the hero, after his high-intensity physical training, quickly swallows a mixture of raw egg whites while covering his nose, as Rocky Balboa does in the saga of the same name.

Rocky must not have been well advised by his nutritionist because researchers have long shown that cooking egg whites (which causes coagulation) significantly increases the bioavailability of proteins: when you eat a raw egg white you only digest 51% of the protein compared to over 90% when it is cooked! [1] But it should be noted that it is the coagulation of the white, and not specifically the cooking, that increases digestibility. This is why you can eat egg whites without fear.

Egg whites also contain avidin, a clamp-like protein that can trap vitamin B8 in the gut, preventing it from being absorbed. If people are foolish enough to eat only raw egg whites, they are at very serious risk of vitamin B8 deficiency [2].

A famous and generally popular recipe using raw, coagulated eggs is chocolate mousse:

Take 6 eggs and 200 grams of organic dark chocolate. Melt the chocolate as is in a double boiler. Separate the whites from the yolks and beat the whites until they are stiff. When the melted chocolate has cooled down a bit, mix in the yolks. Then add the eggs to the mixture, gently, without breaking them. Pour into individual ramekins and leave overnight in the fridge. You can of course add dried fruit, but no sugar, flour or butter is needed.

I personally certify that this recipe is dietetic, whatever the terrorists who would like to deprive us of all the joys of life "for our health" think.

On the contrary, the authorities will advise you to be careful when handling raw eggs to avoid salmonellosis. However, this risk mainly concerns hens raised in poor conditions, and even then only one egg in 30,000 is contaminated, so your risk is really low.

This is no reason to deny yourself the nutritional benefits of raw eggs.

Not all cooking is created equal

If it is relatively important to coagulate the white, it is even more important not to cook the yellow. Indeed, if you are a gourmet (or about to become one) and

you eat quality eggs, their yolks are rich in cholesterol, omega-3 fatty acids and lecithin. All of these healthy fats are fragile and oxidise in the heat and eventually become toxic.

The best way to eat them is in the dish or in the shell, cooked at low temperature (80 °C). There is no need for the water to be boiling, as the egg coagulates between 70 and 80°C. Depending on the size of your egg, about 4 minutes will be enough to obtain the perfect texture: your egg white should be creamy, your yolk just warm and smooth.

But you can also make scrambled eggs in a bain-marie. The final result should be a cream that is only slightly thicker than Montblanc cream, and you can add all sorts of ingredients to flavour it: mushrooms or spices of course, but also herbs and small vegetables.

I guarantee that, after a few attempts, this way of preparing scrambled eggs is a pure delight.

For nutrition enthusiasts

Finally, here is some information that will be of interest to nutrition enthusiasts, explaining why eating eggs is good for your health.

Traditionally produced organic eggs contain one third less cholesterol, one quarter less saturated fat, two thirds more vitamin A, twice as much omega-3, three times as much vitamin E and seven times as much beta-carotene as eggs from battery hens.

In addition :

- The protein in an egg is 'complete protein' because it contains all eight essential amino acids, i.e. those that the body cannot produce itself. The essential amino acids are in balanced proportions (this is why eggs are used as a reference for assessing protein quality and protein content of other foods by the FAO and WHO).
- The yolk of a hen's egg contains lutein and zeaxanthin, two antioxidants from the carotenoid family, which protect the eyes from cataract and age-related macular degeneration. These substances can be destroyed by cooking. Rich in choline, the egg yolk enhances and protects memory. Its folic acid content is of particular interest to pregnant women to prevent *spina bifida* (malformation of the baby's spinal cord). Finally, it contains phosphorus and zinc.

Egg yolk does not raise cholesterol levels

In the 1980s, egg yolk was unfairly accused of raising cholesterol levels. Today, it is known that the cholesterol level in eggs has little to do with dietary cholesterol, as it is manufactured by the liver from sugar.

Jean-Marc Dupuis

Remember that cholesterol is not a poison: every cell in your body needs cholesterol. It helps to make

Cholesterol is a major source of energy for the body, and is also a source of cell membranes, hormones, vitamin D, and bile acids for digesting fats. Cholesterol also helps form memories and is essential for neurological functions. Cholesterol from food is your friend.

In addition, many studies conclude that eggs do not raise cholesterol levels anyway. For example, research published in the *International Journal of Cardiology* showed that in healthy adults, eating eggs every day did not trigger negative effects on endothelial function or increased cholesterol levels.

So you can eat six eggs a week with peace of mind and try a variety of delicious recipes.