A Guide to Finding and Choosing The Healthiest Eggs

They are fooling you. The words on the egg cartons don't mean what you think they do.

"Vegetarian-fed", "cage-free", "omega-3 enriched", "free-range", "organic", "humanely-raised", and "pasture-raised" all seem like healthy choices, but they don't accurately reflect how healthy the eggs are.

The egg aisle of a grocery store is like a political primary debate. Every egg carton is saying what you what to hear to get your vote. But they are just words.

Words that are used with the intent to make you buy the eggs, but they don't provide you with the answer to the question:

Which eggs are the healthiest?

To find the healthiest eggs, you must find the healthiest hens – hens that eat what they are biologically designed to eat.

Chickens are Not Vegetarians

Among the dozens of different egg cartons, you think you've found the holy grail. Eggs from 100% vegetarian-fed chickens. Vegetables are healthy, so these must be the healthiest, right?

The only problem is that the healthiest chickens eat omnivorous diets. Chickens love to munch on green plants, wild seeds, earthworms, and insects. In fact, many chickens prefer insects over plants.

Every time I see "vegetarian-fed" on a carton of eggs, I am reminded of the time I held a big juicy worm four feet above a

group of chickens. They jumped with vigor – flapping their wings, doing anything to get the worm before their hen friends.

Surely, they'd do the same for any kind of food. They are probably just hungry. But when I tried the same with sunflower seeds and fresh organic vegetables, they turned away and continued scraping the ground with their claws to find bugs and worms.

Related: ***Animal vs. Plant Protein – What's Better?***

The Truth About Vegetarian-fed Chickens

"Vegetarian-fed", however, does not mean the chickens are roaming around an organic vegetable garden oasis. In most cases, the egg companies didn't change anything, but how they label their eggs.

For example, an egg carton that is labeled 100% vegetarian-fed and cage-free indicates that the chickens were raised indoors in a confined space with hundreds of other chickens.

To give you some perspective, imagine you are in a subway car during rush hour. Packed so many people that you almost kissed the guy next to you. Now imagine living your life in that subway car – no one gets out unless they die. (But at least you are not in cages, and you get free food!)

The chickens are, however, provided with food that is scientifically designed to cover their needs. Here's an example of a typical "vegetarian" diet reported by Mother Earth News:

> *Here's the ingredients list from "16 percent Layer Crumbles," a feed designed for hens raised in confinement: "Grain Products, Plant Protein Products, Processed Grain Byproducts,*

Roughage Products, Forage Products, Vitamin A Supplement, Vitamin D3 Supplement, Vitamin E Supplement, Vitamin B12 Supplement, Riboflavin Supplement, Niacin Supplement, Calcium Pantothenate, Choline Chloride, Folic Acid, Manadione Sodium Bisulfite Complex, Methionine Supplement, Calcium Carbonate, Salt, Manganous Oxide, Ferrous Sulfate, Copper Chloride, Zinc Oxide, Ethylenediamine Dihydriodide, Sodium Selenite."

This feed may seem like it is covering all of the nutritional needs of the chicken, but studies show that vegetarian-fed chickens that live in confinement lay eggs that have:

- 1/3 more cholesterol
- 1/4 more saturated fat
- 2/3 less vitamin A
- 2 times less omega-3 fatty acids
- 3 times less vitamin E
- 7 times less beta carotene
- 50 percent less folic acid
- 70 percent less vitamin B12
- 50-112% less Vitamin D

But what are they comparing these eggs too? Eggs from chickens that are free to roam the outdoors and eat all types of plants and insects – the healthiest eggs. Words like "pastured", "pasture-raised", and "free-range" on egg cartons seem to reflect this healthy lifestyle, but they do not guarantee that the chickens were raised in this way. In fact, "pastured", "pasture-raised", and "free-range" eggs just mean that the chickens had some access to the outdoors – regardless if it is a lifeless mud pit or a luscious green pasture.

But does it really matter if the chickens are outdoors? If we feed them a wide variety of seeds, plants, and insects, then they'll be healthy, right?

Not so fast. Like humans, chickens don't solely rely on diet for health. Sun exposure matters as much to chickens as it

does to us.

Chickens Sun Bathe Too

If we don’t get any sun, our vitamin D levels drop, followed by less energy and depression. When we are chronically vitamin D deficient, our bones can become brittle and break easily. The same happens to chickens who have little access to the outdoors. (That’s right, they synthesize vitamin D from the sun just like us.)

Vitamin D deficient chickens will also lay brittle eggs that provide us with less nutrition. But the vegeterian feed has vitamin D in it – shouldn’t that cover their vitamin D needs?

Two animal researchers, Heuser and Norris, showed that 11 to 45 minutes of sunshine daily were sufficient to prevent rickets in growing chickens, but no improvements were obtained with vitamin D supplementation. This suggests that chickens are much better at using sunlight to synthesize vitamin D than using supplemental vitamin D.

Related: *Vitamin D – The #1 Vitamin You Need: From Treating Depression to Preventing Cancer*

What About “Omega-3 Enriched” Eggs?

Don’t fall for the hype. Although they do have higher omega-3s, these eggs are just as bad as conventional eggs.

Omega-3 enriched eggs usually come from chickens that are fed omega-3 supplements like krill oil, flaxseed oil, and algae oil on top of their unhealthy vegetarian diet. These oils are most likely rancid and unhealthy for the chickens.

The healthiest way to enrich eggs with omega-3s is by letting the chickens eat what they are designed to eat. Chickens that naturally feed on pasture have significantly increased amounts

of omega-3s in their eggs compared to conventional eggs.

Related: *Everything You Should Know About Fat*

The Healthiest Egg

Now, we are beginning to put it all together. Chickens are omnivores that need access to the outdoors whenever they choose. Eggs that come from chickens who live the way that they are supposed to live are the healthiest.

This contention is even backed up by research that Mother Earth News conducted. They tested the nutrient content of eggs from chickens who lived under natural conditions. The editor-in-chief of Mother Earth News, Cheryl Long, commented that:

“Our test results reveal that the unnatural and inhumane conditions of factory farms are giving us substandard food. Consumers will get more nutritious eggs if they pay a premium for true free-range eggs from birds raised on pasture.”

How to Know if You Have The Healthiest Eggs



It doesn’t matter how many catchy words an egg carton throws at you. It could say “pasture-raised”, “non-GMO”, “humanely

raised", "organic", or "I swear to God these are healthy – please trust me," but that doesn't mean they are the best eggs you can get.

This is because claims like "pastured" "pasture-raise" "cage-free" and "free-range" don't mean what you think they do. Labeling laws allow egg products to display these terms even if the egg-laying chickens spend little or no time outdoors in a pasture setting.

Non-GMO and organic eggs are also promising, but organic and non-GMO eggs may still be fed a vegetarian diet with little access to the outdoors. Bummer. So what can you do?

The only way to find the healthiest possible eggs is to connect with the farmer of the chickens that made them. Visit or reach out to the farm/company that produces the eggs that you normally buy and find out how they raise their hens. I've personally done this for Handsome Brook Farm's pasture-raised eggs and found out that they were making false claims on their packaging. Their eggs are no better than cheaper "cage-free" eggs.

To find the healthiest eggs, it is best to stay local and get to know the farmer. Do a quick search on localharvest.org and eatwild.com to find a farmer that has quality eggs.

The Quickest Way to Know if You Have High-Quality Eggs

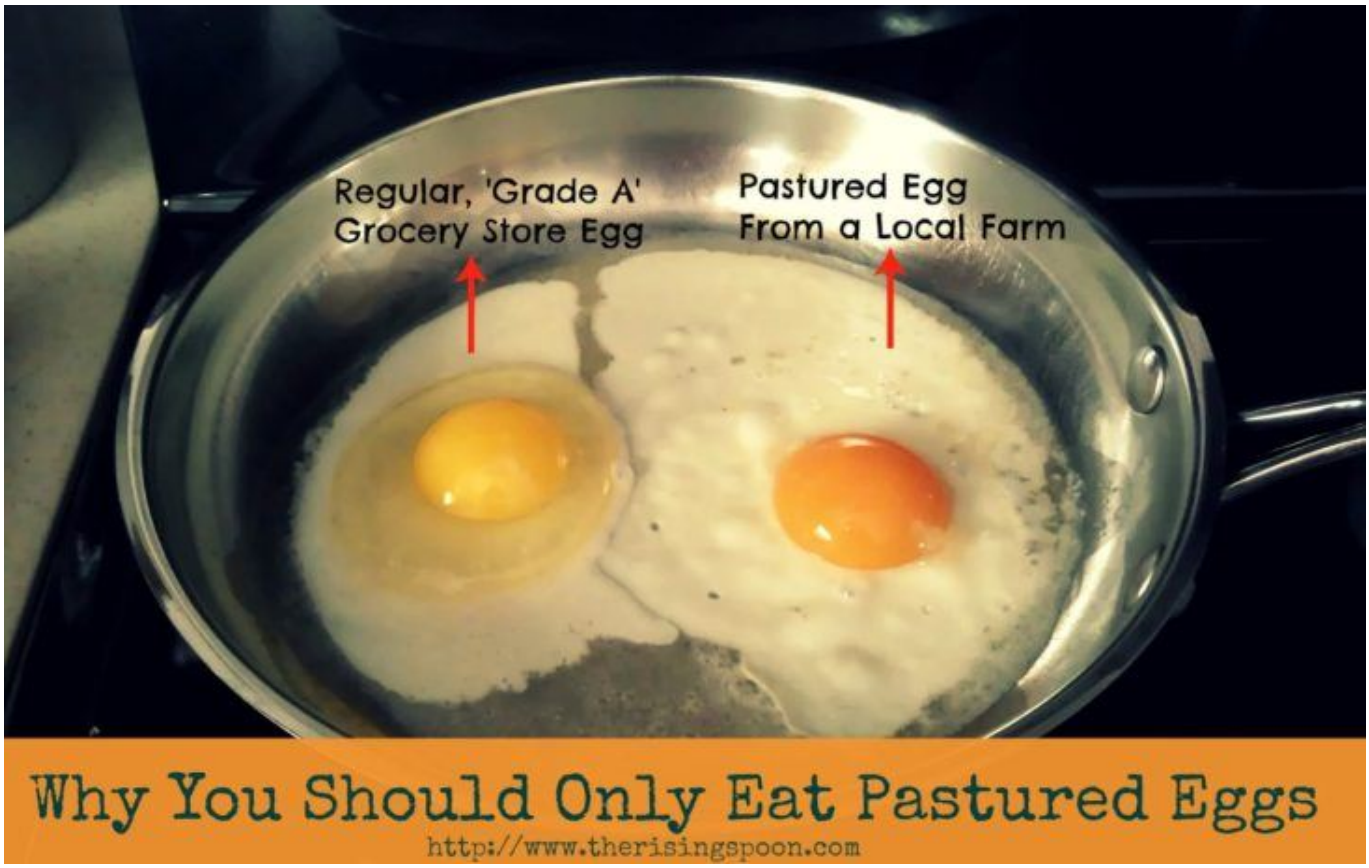
If you are not sure that you can trust the eggs you are having now, you can test them in two ways.

The Egg Shell Crack Test:

If the egg shell is very brittle and has little to no membrane on the inside, then it came from a chicken that is vitamin D deficient (and probably deficient in other vitamins and

minerals as well). This indicates that the chickens didn’t have much access to the sun.

The Egg Yolk Color Test:



Egg yolks with a deep orange color are higher in vitamin A and beta-carotene. This deep color indicates that the chicken has access to a diverse array of different plants. A pale, yellow yolk tells you that the chicken ate a diet consisting of mostly white corn and other nutrient-depleted grains that aren’t as healthy for the chicken.

Does Your Egg Pass The Test?

If the egg shell is resilient, and the yolk is a dense orange color then you have some healthy eggs. Conversely, if the shell shatters easily and has a pale yolk then it most likely came from an unhealthy chicken.

The Best Way to Prepare Eggs

If you have high-quality eggs, it is best to eat the yolk raw and cook the egg whites.

Eggs yolks should be eaten raw because cooking them will oxidize their cholesterol (rendering it unhealthy), and denature many of the vitamins (rendering them useless). If you don’t like the taste of raw eggs, then put a couple yolks into your morning smoothies with some lemon juice. This way you won’t taste the raw egg, and the lemon juice will prevent some of the nutrients from denaturing.

But before you eat the yolk, make sure you separate it from the egg white. The egg white has proteins in it that bind to the b-vitamins, making them useless. If you want to get the extra protein that the whites provide, then you can cook them until they turn white (but not brown). Cooking the egg white will deactivate the proteins binding to the b-vitamins, so you can get all of the vitamins out of the raw yolk and all of the protein from the whites at the same time.

The Takeaway

The healthiest eggs come from the healthiest hens.

Don’t blindly trust the words on the egg carton. The only way to know if you have healthy eggs is by finding out how the chickens are raised. Do your research, and get to know your egg farmer.

If you are looking to get the most nutrition out of your high-quality eggs, it is best to have the egg yolks raw and the egg whites cooked.

Recommended Reading:

- *Homemade Calcium and Magnesium*

- *Detox Cheap and Easy Without Fasting – Recipes Included*
- *The Benefits of Backyard Chickens*
- *Pasture-Raised Eggs Are a Nutritional Powerhouse*

Sources:

- *Egg Labels: What To Look For* – 100 Days of Real Food (Image Credit)
- *Raising Backyard Chickens Part 3 – Pastured Eggs vs. Store Bought* – The Dabblist (Image credit)
- *Meet Real Free-Range Eggs* – Mother Earth News
- *Eggs, pasture-raised* – The World's Healthiest Foods
- *Beware of Misleading Omega-3 Claims* – Mercola
- *Vitamin D* – DSM
- *Important Update on Eating Raw Eggs* – Mercola
- *Vitamin B12 bioavailability from egg yolk and egg white: relationship to binding proteins.* – NCBI
- *Free-Range Eggs Contain More Vitamin D According to Mother Earth News Study* – Organic Consumers Association
- *False Egg Labeling Case Against Handsome Brook Farm Can Proceed, Court Rules* – Animal Legal Defense Fund