

# To Your Good Health

By Cindy Felts



The egg is getting a bad rap.

It's true the American Heart Association recommends that if you have a high cholesterol level, you should limit whole egg consumption to three per week. Egg yolks have one of the highest cholesterol contents of any food. And if your blood is high in cholesterol, you're more likely to get arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries).

But the public has gone one step beyond the AHA recommendation — egg consumption has dropped dramatically. Many people now assume that eating eggs will raise their cholesterol levels, thus making them more susceptible to heart disease.

That's simply not true, says Dr. Margaret Flynn, associate professor of nutrition in the department of community health and medical practice.

Although "cholesterol comes off on your arteries and 'gunks' them up," Flynn says, preliminary results of her research show that if you have a normal cholesterol level, you won't be affected by the number of eggs you eat.

This is good news for the egg and breakfast food industries, which have suffered because many people no longer believe the old-fashioned bacon-and-eggs, toast-and butter breakfast is good for them. Per capita consumption of eggs totaled 287 in all forms in 1974, down from 294 in 1973 and 307 in 1972. In 1945 the average American ate 400 eggs.

five years had been volunteer subjects for heart monitoring and heart disease research at the Med Center. Flynn chose 125 men whose serum cholesterol level had been normal for those five years and split them into two groups.

The first group ate an egg a day, any style, for three months, and the second group ate no eggs. The men switched for a second three-month period. Their blood was analyzed at the beginning of the experiment and at the end of each three-month period.

"They were getting 200 to 350 milligrams of cholesterol in each egg every day," Flynn says. A normal total for cholesterol in the blood is up to 240 milligrams percent. "But when we analyzed their blood at the end, we found that eating an egg a day didn't make any difference," she says.

One egg a day may not seem like much. But one man jokingly told Flynn that whenever he drove through the country, he had an almost overpowering desire to sit on a barbed wire fence!

Flynn is confident the men stuck to their diets. "Many of them are on the faculty and are involved in research themselves," she says. No other restrictions were placed on the volunteers — they all maintained their normal lifestyle and diets, except for the egg requirement.



The study "simply compared each man to himself, to see if the egg a day changed anything," Flynn says. The men were not necessarily in the low-risk heart disease category, she says. "Some were smokers. But they had all demonstrated, over a period of five years, that whatever their lifestyle, their cholesterol level was not above normal."

Flynn eventually hopes to study milk and butter in the same way. And, she is beginning to monitor women, who, because of changing lifestyles, are becoming more prone to heart disease.

To determine your risk of heart disease, see your doctor, says Flynn. Only a physician can determine your risk by assessing your family history, testing your serum cholesterol level and taking an electrocardiogram.

"If I had a documented history of heart disease, I'd be more apt to follow strict health conditions. I wouldn't smoke or eat too many saturated fats. I'd get plenty of exercise. And I'd limit whole egg consumption to three per week," Flynn says.

"But that doesn't mean no eggs at all, as many people have come to believe." She emphasizes that some cholesterol is an essential part of everyone's diet and that it's particularly essential during a child's growing period.

And, while the connection between cholesterol and heart disease probably shouldn't be played down, if you don't already have a high cholesterol level, just eating eggs apparently won't give you one. □



Flynn found a willing group of subjects in 845 University men employees — faculty and staff — who for