

Specialty Eggs



Egg Nutrition Center

In an effort to meet consumers' demand for specialty eggs, egg producers have begun marketing free-range, cage-free, omega-3, vegetarian, organic, fertile, in shell pasteurized, and other branded eggs. These eggs offer alternative choices to consumers with special requirements. However, due to higher production costs specialty eggs are usually more expensive than generic shell eggs. Also, except for nutrient enhanced eggs, such as omega-3 enriched eggs, specialty eggs such as cage-free eggs and organic usually have similar levels of nutrients as generic eggs. Nutrient content can only be changed by altering the feed the hens eat, not by changing their environment.

Currently there are no set definitions for specialty eggs and consumers are advised to read the label before they buy.

Vegetarian/Organic Eggs

Vegetarian eggs and organic eggs are available from hens fed either feed free of animal by products or feed grown without pesticides, fungicides, herbicides, or commercial fertilizers, respectively. Starting October 2002, the National Organic Standard

Board will set standards for using the term "organic" for eggs. Growth hormones are not used in the egg industry. Neither specialty eggs nor generic eggs have hormones in them. And while antibiotics are sometimes used to treat sick birds, this is not a routine industry practice.

Cage-Free Alternatives

These days, most hens are housed in large laying facilities that use a cage system. This provides hens with optimal temperature, humidity, feed, water, laying space, and security. Even though this housing method may seem to some to limit a hen's freedom, this system is actually designed for the welfare of the birds as well as for production

results in better-fed hens and they produce more uniform quality eggs. Egg producers are also phasing in larger cages or allowing more space to house the birds. However, for consumers who object to housing hens in cages, they have alternative choices, such as Free-Range Eggs or Cage-Free Eggs.

Free-Range Eggs come from hens that are either raised outdoors or have access to the outdoors. Due to seasonal conditions however, few hens are actually raised outdoors and access to outdoors can vary greatly between producers.

Cage-Free Eggs come from indoor floor operation. Hens do not necessarily have access to the outdoors. Mortality rates are higher in the Free-Range and Cage-Free birds since they tend to peck at each other and cause bodily harm in this environment.

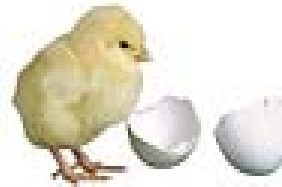
Fertile Eggs

Some cultures consider fertile eggs a delicacy. But aside from coming from a hen that has possibly mated with a rooster, there is no nutritional difference between fertile eggs and generic eggs.



Where to Buy Specialty Eggs

Most large grocery stores carry various types of specialty eggs. Usually they are in the dairy section next to the generic shell eggs. If you have further questions about specialty eggs, check our website (www.encyc-online.org/links.htm). Specialty egg companies can provide you with more detailed information about their products.



efficiency. In the hen house, the birds are more readily protected from the elements, from disease, and from both natural and unnatural (automobiles) predators. Housing hens also makes it possible to control their diet which

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Aracauna Eggs

Aracauna eggs are from Aracauna chickens, native to South America. Nutritionally, these bluish green eggs are not much different from traditional white and brown eggs you find in the local grocery stores. Actually, even though many consumers think these eggs are lower in cholesterol, eggs from this breed have a higher cholesterol content. Nutrient content of eggs can only be altered by modifying the bird feed.

Pasteurized Shell Eggs

Pasteurized shell eggs are a good choice for people who want to use raw eggs in their recipes that don't require further cooking, such as homemade ice-

cream or Caesar salad dressing. These eggs have been heat treated to kill potential salmonella bacteria found inside. (The risk of purchasing an egg contaminated with salmonella bacteria is one in 20,000 eggs.) However, due to the heat processing, these eggs may have slightly lower amounts of heat-sensitive vitamins.

Thoroughly cooking generic shell eggs until whites are firm and yolks are beginning to thicken will also destroy any potential salmonella bacteria in the egg.

Animal Care Certified Eggs

Egg producers have also begun implementing new animal welfare standards

which improve the care and handling of hens used to lay commercial eggs. These standards were developed by an independent scientific advisory committee made up of scientists from government agencies, academia, and US Humane Association. These guidelines assure that Animal Care Certified Eggs are from hens maintained under humane conditions with attention to living conditions, health care and treatment. When you purchase Animal Care Certified Eggs, you can be sure that animal welfare and health were important factors considered in producing the eggs.



Due to higher production costs, specialty eggs are usually more expensive than generic shell eggs.

Nutrient-Enhanced Eggs

Commercially raised hens are fed specially formulated feed that consists of corn, cottonseed, soybean meal, and/or sorghum – depending on which grain is most affordable. Sometimes animal by-products are also added to increase protein content. The feed is carefully balanced by a poultry nutrition specialists to combine the right amounts of protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals. However, by manipulating ingredients in the feed, some producers are enhancing the nutrients in their eggs. For example, by including flax, marine algae, or fish oils in the feed, omega-3

fatty acid content in egg yolks can be dramatically increased. These high omega-3 fatty acid enriched eggs are a good choice for people who want to increase their in-



take of omega-3 fatty acids, but does not regularly eat fish. The demand for omega-3 eggs is increasing as we learn more about the health benefits

associated with these oil. Another benefit to these omega-3 eggs is they have higher vitamin E levels than generic eggs.

Also, eggs from birds raised on a diet that includes marigold extract are high in lutein, a nutrient that has been shown to reduce the risk of macular degeneration. According to one study, lutein in eggs are better absorbed by the body than other lutein sources, since the lutein in eggs is found together with the easily absorbable fats.

Now you know. As in humans, good nutrition is essential in a hen's ability to produce eggs.



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