Media Release

How to get your dose of choline - the unknown but essential nutrient

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Just as you thought you had your diet sorted, along comes another nutrient for you to consider.

Choline is an essential nutrient that has until recently flown under the radar. It helps metabolise fat, maintain healthy cell membranes and may improve brain functioning and memory. Plus, recent research out of the US has highlighted the importance of choline during pregnancy and early infancy.

Despite the growing understanding of the health benefits of choline, people are failing to get their recommended daily intake. Research published last year in Nutrients Open Access Human Nutrition Journal found only 8.5% of pregnant women in the US are meeting the required daily choline intake. This is an issue because choline plays a significant role in brain development before birth and early infancy.

A study conducted by scientists at Cornell University found the information processing and reaction speed of infants was improved when mums consumed higher amounts of choline during the last trimester of pregnancy. Further, research published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found consuming eggs - a food source rich in choline - during early complementary feeding of infants has benefits for growth and development.

Choline is naturally found in eggs, wheat germ, green leafy vegetables, pulses, soybeans, grains and nuts so eating a variety of these foods makes meeting daily choline requirements easier.

Sharon Natoli, Director at Food and Nutrition Australia, said choline is an essential nutrient we don't hear much about in Australia but it has been the subject of a number of studies by nutrition research institutes in America in recent years.

"We know from American studies that egg yolk is the most significant source of choline and it is much easier to meet the recommended daily intake by including eggs regularly in your diet," Ms Natoli said.

"People who eat eggs have almost double the usual intake of choline compared to non-egg consumers. Eating other common protein-rich foods increases choline intake too, but not to the same degree as eggs.

"For pregnant women, other essential nutrients like folate, iron, omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin B12, are also found in eggs."

Eggs provide more choline per kilojoule when compared to most other food sources. For example, to get the same amount of choline found in a single egg (125 mg/301 kilojoules), one would need to consume 3¼ cups of skim milk (1130 kilojoules) or 99g of wheat germ (1532 kilojoules).

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