

What makes a healthy egg?

Caged egg-laying hens have dominated the news when it comes to farm animal welfare, and for good reason. We know that cages cause severe frustration and stress to these birds. Battery cages make even basic movement impossible, and do not allow important natural behaviours like foraging, perching, nesting and dust bathing to occur.

Fortunately, the fight for cage-free eggs just got another boost. It turns out that cage-free systems can mean healthier environments for chickens, as well as healthier eggs on your plate!

Chickens have an innate need to scratch and root in the earth, which cages simply do not allow. Birds that are able to forage naturally and have access to a well-balanced, nutritional diet, pass on these health benefits to their eggs. A [2016 investigation from CBC Marketplace](#) revealed that free range and Certified Organic eggs can have big nutritional gains over their caged counterparts. In fact, this investigation proved what research has been showing us for years.



A [2007 study](#) (PDF) found that eggs from pastured hens have significantly more healthy nutrients such as Vitamin A, Omega-3 fatty acids, Vitamin E, and beta carotene when compared to data collected by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) on eggs produced by caged hens. Further, unhealthy cholesterol and saturated fats were higher in caged eggs than in eggs from pasture-raised hens.

In 2010, [a more comprehensive study](#) (PDF) confirmed that pasture-based egg production yields eggs with more Vitamin E and Omega-3 fatty acids than eggs produced by caged hens. Clearly, the science is in: the grass really is greener!

But foraging is only one natural behaviour important to hens. The ability to perch up high and watch for predators, to dust bathe to maintain skin and feather health, and to lay an egg in a secluded nest are also very important behaviours to the hen, not to mention important for her health.

A hen naturally seeks out the privacy of a nest when it's time to lay her egg, but hens housed in battery cages have no access to nests. As a result, caged hens become stressed and may try to hold onto an egg longer in hopes of finding a nice, secluded nest. This causes excess calcium on the egg shell, [which happens often for battery caged hens](#) (video). Look for a white film on brown egg shells next time you're in the grocery store and see if you can spot the eggs that came from stressed hens.



When the hens are happy and have access to an environment that allows for natural, healthy behaviours, the result is better for you, the hen, and for peace of mind. You can rest assured that your eggs are coming from content hens when you [choose SPCA Certified eggs](#).