

What Ayurveda can tell us about rice

Rice, one of the oldest cultivated plants, plays a central role in the diet of many cultures, especially in Asia.

Indian lore cherishes several legends about the origin of rice. One of them is about Shiva, one of the main deities in Hinduism. It recounts how Shiva wooed a woman of great beauty and promised her the fulfillment of her every wish. She asked him to find a food that any human being could eat at any time without developing an aversion to it. Shiva accepted the challenge and began his search for the perfect food.

He tried many foods. Alas, none of them met the request by his beloved and she died before Shiva's search was completed. A little later, on her grave grew a plant with tasty seeds: a rice plant. Finally, Shiva had found the plant which provided the perfect food for all people.

Since then, rice has been considered Shiva's gift to mankind. Apart from cooking, it is also used in many Hindu ceremonies and rituals.

Rice and Ayurveda

Ayurveda describes rice as a nourishing, easily digestible and energizing food that plays an important role in maintaining a healthy balance of body and mind and is categorized as Sattvic (balancing). Different types of rice are recommended, depending on the individual constitution and to alleviate various ailments.

Basmati rice is considered particularly wholesome and well-tolerated by almost everyone.

For people with a Pitta constitution, brown rice is recommended, because it has a cooling effect and can thus alleviate complaints related to Pitta Dosha, such as inflammation and heartburn.

People with a constitution dominated by Kapha Dosha are advised to use whole grain rice, as it is easier to digest and stimulates the metabolism.

According to tradition, before use, rice should be aged for a long time, even up to seven years. However, such rice is harder to obtain and much more expensive. Long-aged rice has a darker color, requires longer cooking, and absorbs more water during preparation. But even storing rice for two years significantly increases its wholesomeness.





Rice is a real all-rounder on account of its neutral, just slightly sweet taste, and can be used for savory dishes and desserts alike, as well as in the form of flour or flakes. Rice is generally easy to digest and reduces heat in the physiology. Its slightly Vata-increasing and drying properties can be counteracted by adding a little cardamom during cooking. Rice nourishes and builds Kapha Dosha, as well as the reproductive tissues (Shukra Dhatu).

In Ayurveda, rice is often used as part of fasting regimens. Its detoxifying effects can help cleanse and regenerate the body. Rice can also play a supportive role in digestive problems such as diarrhea and constipation.

Rice is rich in carbohydrates, provides energy to the body and can be combined in multiple ways. It is gluten-free and contains many important nutrients, such as iron, magnesium, potassium, and B vitamins.

At the same time, rice is low in sodium and has a dehydrating effect. Rice is also a good source of fiber, helping with digestion and regulating blood sugar levels.

Different varieties and types of rice

The best-known rice varieties are long-grain rice and basmati rice. Basmati rice was discovered in the highlands of Kashmir about 3,000 years ago and is considered the finest rice in India. In total, more than 40,000 varieties of rice are known worldwide, but only a few of these are marketed. The various types of rice differ in appearance, taste, and cooking behavior, and also in their effect on the Doshas.



Some popular rice varieties are:

1. **Basmati rice** is an aromatic, long and slender rice variety, grown mainly in India and Pakistan at an altitude of over 800 meters. It has a slightly nutty aroma and a fluffy texture. Basmati rice is often used in dishes such as Biryani (fried rice) or Pilau (rice cooked in vegetable broth).
2. **Jasmine rice** originates from Thailand and has a fragrant, flowery taste. It is of medium grain size and has a soft, sticky texture. Jasmine rice is often used in dishes such as curry and fried rice.
3. **Long-grain rice** is a very common type of rice with long grains and a neutral taste. It doesn't stick easily and has a rather firm consistence. Long-grain rice is well suited for salads or as a side dish with meat and vegetables.
4. **Round-grain rice** has a short, plump grain shape and sticks together easily when cooked. It is an important ingredient in Japanese and Korean cuisine and is often used in sushi and rice balls.
5. **Black rice** has a dark color and a nutty flavor. It contains many antioxidants and is a good source of fiber and protein. Black rice is often used as a side dish or in desserts.
6. **Red rice** is a variety of whole-grain rice, characterized by its reddish color and nutty flavor. The red hue is due to the presence of anthocyanins, natural plant pigments that have antioxidant properties. Red rice is regarded as a healthier alternative to white rice and also has a cholesterol-lowering effect due to its antioxidant content.
7. **Wild rice** actually is not a rice variety, but a kind of grass from North America. It has a long, thin grain shape and a hearty flavor. Wild rice is rich in fiber and protein and is often used in salads, as a side dish or for special desserts.
8. **Whole-grain rice** is rice that has not had the husk removed, so it contains more fiber and nutrients than white rice. It has a nutty flavor and takes a little longer to cook than white rice.

Common ways of processing rice

1.Husking: After harvesting, the hard, outer layer of the rice grain is removed. This is called hulling or husking and the remaining kernel is called brown rice.

2.Parboiling is a processing method in which the rice grains are steamed before husking. This is done by soaking whole-grain rice in hot water or steam and then drying it. This process allows some nutrients, especially vitamins and minerals, to be stored in the grain, so that they are not lost when the husk is removed. After parboiling, the rice is usually husked and polished to obtain white rice.

3.Polishing: Brown rice can be further processed by removing the silver layer from the grain's surface. This is called polishing. In the process, also nutrients such as fiber, vitamins and minerals are removed. What remains is white rice, which is preferred in many countries.

4.Milling: Rice can be milled into flour, which is used in the baking industry and for making pasta and other foods.

5.Fermenting: In some cultures, rice is fermented to make various foods and beverages. Examples include rice wine, rice vinegar, and Kimchi, a Korean fermented vegetable dish.

6.Puffing: Rice can be heated and expanded to produce puffed rice, which is used in breakfast cereals and snacks.

Brown rice contains the largest amounts of nutrients and minerals. Some of the valuable ingredients are lost during processing, with polished rice performing poorest, as the nutrients in the outer layer of the grain are removed in the process.



Ayurveda tips for preparing rice

Ayurveda places great importance on food being easily digestible, so as to optimize the absorption of the nutrients from the intestines into the blood and from there into the body cells. With regard to grains, Ayurveda recommends increasing their digestibility by roasting them before cooking or by increasing the amount of water added.

Roasting

Dry roasting changes the composition of the various starches on the grain's surface and caramelizes some of them, which adds flavor to the rice. After starch is reduced by the roasting process, the rice doesn't become as sticky and stays fluffier.

Sautéing

When sautéing, you can also add oil, which is a good flavor carrier and thus makes the rice dish even tastier, but also a little heavier to digest.



Add more water

Traditionally, when cooking rice for side dishes, one uses 1 part rice to 2 parts water. If you take the same ratio for whole-grain rice, this rice becomes quite difficult to digest. Therefore, we recommend using 3 parts water to 1 part rice when cooking whole-grain rice. This way, the rice will be much lighter without becoming mushy.

The towel trick

When the rice has been cooked, wrap the lid of the cooking pot in a cotton or linen tea towel and place it back on the pot. The cloth will now absorb a lot of steam and your rice will be extra fragrant!



Concerning arsenic in rice

Arsenic is a naturally-occurring semimetal, present in trace amounts in soil, water, and food, and in slightly larger concentrations in fish, algae, and also in rice. Since rice is usually cultivated in water-rich areas, its rapid growth entails absorbing arsenic from soil and water in greater quantities.



Some useful facts concerning arsenic in rice:

1. The level of inorganic arsenic, which is considered a carcinogen, is higher in rice than in most other foods.
2. Arsenic can be detected in almost all rice varieties, in different concentrations. Basmati rice from India and Pakistan and the type 'Arroz Bomba' from Spain have the lowest levels of arsenic.
3. In the long term, consumption of elevated doses of arsenic can lead to health problems. These include skin changes, nerve damage, diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease.
4. To reduce the exposure to arsenic from rice, it is recommended to rinse the rice well and boil it in more water – 4 to 6 times the amount of rice. This way, when you drain the rice through a sieve after cooking, the arsenic content is reduced by 75%. Basmati rice, which is widely used in Ayurvedic cooking, contains little arsenic, so rinsing it several times before cooking is sufficient in this case. Generally, it is a good idea to vary the types of rice you eat in order to reduce the risk of long-term arsenic exposure.
5. Countries and organizations have set limits for the amount of inorganic arsenic in food products. For example, the European Union currently maintains a limit of 0.1 milligrams of inorganic arsenic per kilogram of rice.

While this all sounds quite serious, there is no need to worry if you consume moderate amounts of rice and follow the tips mentioned above. In addition to buying high-quality products, correct preparation and a varied menu are important. Then the benefits will easily outweigh the risk and there will be no obstacle to healthy enjoyment – bon appétit!

Feel free to contact us for more information.



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