

Rice ideal for sweet and savoury

Alison Pask, New Zealand registered dietitian, provides advice on including rice as part of a healthy eating plan.

Rice is the primary food for more than three billion people worldwide. Rice tolerates a variety of climates and poor soil conditions where other crops will not grow. With many Asian cuisines being introduced to New Zealand during the past few years, Kiwis are more familiar with the cuisine rice brings and, as a result, rice has become a staple in many New Zealand homes.

Rice is a bland food and readily takes on any flavours that are added, making it an ideal base for both savoury and sweet dishes. Rice forms the basis of many signature dishes, including sushi, paella, fried rice and rice pudding.



Nutrition

Rice is rich in genetic diversity, with more than 40,000 different varieties recorded, each with small variations in nutritional values. All rice is rich in carbohydrates, making it a valuable contribution to the energy intake of meals. It is also low in fat and sodium and, as it is gluten-free, it is suitable for people with celiac disease.

One cup of cooked white rice provides approx 40 grams of carbohydrate.

Glycemic Index (GI) of rice

According to Dr Alan Barclay, it's the amylose content that counts when it comes to the GI of rice. Amylose is a kind of starch that resists gelatinisation. When you cook rice, millions of microscopic cracks in the grains let water penetrate right to the middle of the grain, allowing the starch granules to swell and become fully 'gelatinised', thus easy to digest. Greater gelatinisation of starch means higher GI. Dr Barclay says its true that white rice, such as jasmine, has a high GI but brown rice often has a surprisingly high GI, too.

For better blood glucose, lower GI rice is recommended, including basmati, doongara clever rice, moolgiri medium grain, Uncle Ben's ready rice brown rice pouch range.

For more information on GI go to www.glycemicindex.com

Types of rice

See the table below for types of rice and their uses.

Brown rice goes through less processing and retains part of the germ and part of the husk, which results in brown rice containing fibre. The outer layer provides a nutty, chewy flavour which adds extra flavour and texture. The additional fibre from the outer layer results in brown rice being more filling and retaining more nutritional value. Pre-soaking brown rice will reduce the longer cooking time required.

Wild rice is not actually rice at all, but an aquatic grass with brown/black grains, a chewy texture and nutty flavour. It needs to be washed before use and is often mixed with other kinds of rice because it is expensive. Serve it flavoured with red onions, mushrooms or nuts, or as a base for a summer salad.

Type of rice	Texture	Examples	Common in	Use for
Short grain	Soft, creamy, sticky texture	Sushi	Japanese meals	desserts nori rolls sushi
Medium grain	Chewier than long grain	Arborio	Mediterranean meals	Chicken stuffings, rissoles, stuffed vegetables, soups, risotto
Long grain	Grains remain separate and fluffy	Basmati Jasmine	South East Asian Indian Thai Vietnamese Chinese	fried rice, stir fries, curries, and rice salads.

“Rice is the best,
the most nutritive and
unquestionably the
most widespread staple
in the world.”

Escoffier

Cooking rice

One cup of uncooked rice will produce about three cups of cooked rice. This is an ideal amount for three people. Aim for a serving size of one cup of cooked rice per person. Brown rice yields slightly less volume.

If using a rice cooker, the end result will be fluffier if it has been rinsed first. Never wash risotto rice, as you'll lose some of the starch needed to make your risotto creamy.

Rice can cause food poisoning

Cooked rice contains harmful bacteria that grow quickly in leftover rice. It is important to refrigerate leftover rice immediately and don't reheat it more than once. Cold leftover rice makes ideal fried rice but ensure it has been stored in the fridge after cooking, and do not reheat it again.

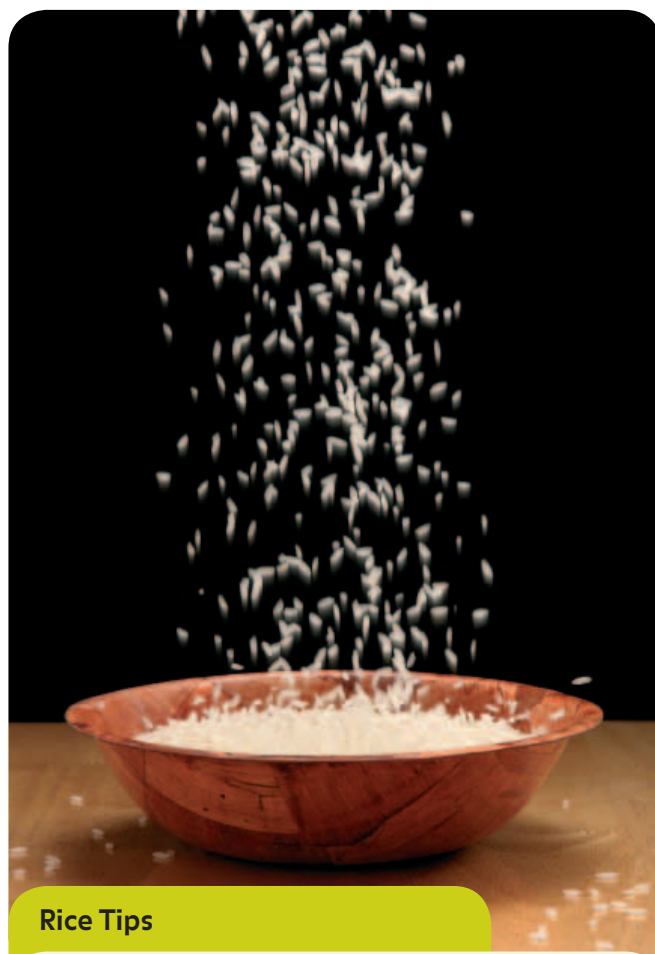
Rice pudding

This can be a nutritious dessert for those with small appetites, or people who are ill or need soft foods, especially elderly people with diabetes. It is ideal served with fresh seasonal fruit such as berries or canned fruit. A milky dessert can be satisfying and nutritious, provided it is served without added cream. Normal sugar is fine to add for sweetness but try adding only half the amount of sugar indicated in the recipe.

The future

Modern technology throughout the world has made it possible to modify many foods, including rice, and this has resulted in golden rice being born from a genetic mix of rice with daffodils. The golden colour adds carotenoids, which have health benefits.

Enriched rice is commonly eaten in America and is the result of extra vitamins and minerals added in after processing, improving the nutritional value and replacing vitamins lost during processing and polishing. These foods are not commonly available in New Zealand.



Rice Tips

- When using rice remember to include plenty of vegetables. A curry and rice meal often misses out vegetables.
- When making fried rice, use brown rice – it adds extra crunch.
- Keep rice portions moderate, no more than a cup of cooked rice per person, per meal, as eating too much rice can have a marked effect on blood glucose levels.
- Follow the Diabetes New Zealand healthy plate, with one quarter of the plate being carbohydrate, in this instance, rice.
- Look at the total carbohydrate level of the meal, not just the rice. This includes extra bread and potatoes. ●

Article by Alison Pask, New Zealand Registered Dietitian, who is working in a newly created role as the community dietitian working across all PHOs in the Porirua Region, Wellington. Her work mainly involves educating people with diabetes.