

Rice

Rice is the staple food for 17 countries in Asia and the Pacific, nine countries in North and South America and eight countries in Africa. It is amazing to think that rice provides 20 percent of the world's dietary energy supply. Currently 90% of the world crop is eaten in Asia. China is the world's leading producer and consumer of rice, followed by India.

Although there are pizza and hamburger fastfood restaurants almost everywhere, in certain parts of Asia they have not fallen into the fastfood trap and many people eat rice three times a day. In Asia, eating rice is a way of life. Rice is popular because it is easy to cook, easy to store and most importantly it is inexpensive and filling. Rice is grown in diverse conditions, from hot countries like Egypt, to cold countries and the uplands of Nepal.

Rice is a kind of grass, the look-alike of a weed and grows about 2 to 5 feet tall and grows best when submerged in water. With fusion cooking increasing in popularity it is interesting to know more about the different types of rice and its nutritional content.

Thousand of varieties are grown throughout the world and exported. In its natural unmilled state, rice comes in many different colours; brown, red, purple and even black. Unmilled rice has a higher nutrient content than milled or polished white rice. Many countries have signature recipes containing rice, such as sushi, fried rice, curry, paella and risotto. Some sweets are made from rice. Each country has its own particular set of preferences regarding the texture, taste, colour and stickiness of the rice they eat.

Here are the main types of rice found on our supermarkets shelves:

- Arborio or risotto rice
- Jasmine or Thai fragrant rice
- Wild rice with white long-grain rice
- White long-grain rice
- Brown rice
- Basmati rice
- Flavoured rice
- Ready-cooked rice

Brown rice is rice with the hull removed and the bran layers left clinging to the grains. It has a tan colour and a nutty flavour. Brown rice contains twice as much fiber and five times the amount of Vitamin E and three times the amount of magnesium, compared to white rice. Parboiled rice is very popular; it is rice that has been steam pressure treated before milling, firm in texture and separates when cooked.

Rice is high in complex carbohydrates, is a fair source of protein, contains virtually no fat and is naturally low in salt. Rice is a good source of vitamins and minerals such as thiamine, niacin, iron, riboflavin, vitamin D, calcium and fibre.

An average portion of rice (50g) provides only 245 kcal, so those looking to reduce their fat and cholesterol intakes can reassuringly turn to rice. Because of its complex carbohydrate content the carbohydrates digest slowly, allowing the body to utilize the energy released over a longer period, making you feel fuller for longer. Rice is also naturally gluten free, so suitable for coeliacs as well as vegetarians and vegans.