

Is Brown Rice Good for You?

Written by Jillian Kubala, MS, RD

Brown rice is a food often associated with healthy eating.

Considered a whole grain, brown rice is less processed than white rice, which has had its hull, bran and germ removed.

Brown rice only has the hull (a hard protective covering) removed, leaving the nutrient-packed bran and germ.

As a result, brown rice retains the nutrients that white rice lacks such as vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants.

However, many people avoid brown rice due to the rising popularity of low-carb diets.

This article will discuss the health benefits of brown rice to help you decide if it's a healthy food to add to your diet.

Brown Rice Is Surprisingly Nutritious



Although brown rice is a simple food, its nutritional profile is anything but.

Compared to white rice, brown rice has much more to offer in terms of nutrients.

Although similar in calories and carbohydrate content, brown rice outshines white rice in nearly every other category.

One cup of brown rice contains:

- **Calories:** 216
- **Carbs:** 44 grams
- **Fiber:** 3.5 grams
- **Fat:** 1.8 grams
- **Protein:** 5 grams
- **Thiamin (B1):** 12% of the RDI
- **Niacin (B3):** 15% of the RDI
- **Pyridoxine (B6):** 14% of the RDI
- **Pantothenic acid (B5):** 6% of the RDI
- **Iron:** 5% of the RDI
- **Magnesium:** 21% of the RDI
- **Phosphorus:** 16% of the RDI
- **Zinc:** 8% of the RDI
- **Copper:** 10% of the RDI
- **Manganese:** 88% of the RDI
- **Selenium:** 27% of the RDI

This whole grain is also a good source of folate, riboflavin (B2), potassium and calcium.

Additionally, brown rice is exceptionally high in manganese. This little-known mineral is vital for many important processes in the body, such as bone development, wound healing, muscle contraction metabolism, nerve function and blood sugar regulation.

A deficiency in manganese has been linked to a higher risk of developing metabolic syndrome, bone demineralization, impaired growth and low fertility.

Just one cup of rice fulfills nearly all your daily requirement for this important nutrient.

Aside from being an excellent source of vitamins and minerals, brown rice provides powerful plant compounds, as well.

For example, brown rice contains phenols and flavonoids, two types of antioxidants that help protect the body from oxidative stress.

Oxidative stress is associated with a number of health conditions, including heart disease, certain types of cancer and premature aging.

The antioxidants found in brown rice help prevent cell injury caused by unstable molecules called free radicals and reduce inflammation in the body.

Studies suggest that the antioxidants found in rice may be the reason for the low prevalence of certain chronic diseases in areas of the world where rice is a staple food.

SUMMARY

Brown rice is highly nutritious, providing the body with a wide array of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

Is Brown Rice Good for Weight Loss?

Replacing more refined grains with brown rice may help you lose weight.

Refined grains like white rice, white pasta and white bread lack the fiber and nutrients that whole grains like brown rice contain.

For example, one cup (158 grams) of brown rice contains 3.5 grams of fiber, while white rice contains less than 1 gram.

Fiber helps keep you fuller over a longer period of time, so choosing fiber-rich foods may help you consume fewer calories overall.

In fact, studies show that people who eat more whole grains like brown rice weigh less than those who consume fewer whole grains.

A study of over 74,000 women found that those who ate more whole grains weighed consistently less than those who ate fewer whole grains.

Plus, the women who had the highest intake of fiber had a 49% lower risk of major weight gain than the women who had the lowest fiber intake.

Replacing white rice with brown rice may help reduce belly fat, too.

In one study, 40 overweight women who ate 2/3 cup (150 grams) of brown rice per day for six weeks had significant reductions in body weight and waist circumference compared to women who ate the same amount of white rice.

Additionally, the women who ate brown rice experienced a significant decrease in blood pressure and CRP, a marker of inflammation in the body.

SUMMARY

Brown rice contains more fiber than refined grains like white rice. Choosing fiber-rich whole grains like brown rice may reduce belly fat and help you lose weight.

It Can Benefit Heart Health

There's no doubt that brown rice is a heart-healthy food. It is rich in fiber and beneficial compounds that may help reduce the risk of heart disease.

A large study of over 560,000 people showed that people who ate the most dietary fiber had a 24–59% lower risk of developing heart disease, cancer and respiratory diseases.

Similarly, a review of 45 studies found that people who ate the highest amount of whole grains, including brown rice, had a 21% lower risk of coronary heart disease compared to those who ate the least whole grains.

Aside from being a good source of fiber, brown rice contains compounds called lignans that may help reduce heart disease risk factors.

Diets high in lignan-rich foods, such as whole grains, flax seeds, sesame seeds and nuts, have been associated with reduced cholesterol, lower blood pressure and decreased artery stiffness.

What's more, brown rice is high in magnesium, a mineral that plays a critical role in keeping the heart healthy. One review of 40 studies found that increasing dietary magnesium was associated with a 7–22% lower risk of stroke, heart failure and all-cause mortality.

Another review of nine studies demonstrated that every 100 mg/day increase in dietary magnesium reduced heart disease mortality in women by 24–25%.

SUMMARY

Brown rice is packed with fiber, lignans and magnesium, which all have beneficial effects on heart health and heart disease risk.

It's a Better Choice for Those with Diabetes

Reducing carb intake and choosing healthier options is vital for blood sugar control.

Although carbs have the largest impact on blood sugar, people with diabetes can reduce blood sugar and insulin spikes by eating fewer refined grains like white rice.

Replacing white rice with brown rice may benefit people with diabetes in several ways.

In one study, people with type 2 diabetes who ate two servings of brown rice per day experienced a significant decrease in post-meal blood sugar and hemoglobin A1c (a marker of blood sugar control), compared to those who ate white rice.

Brown rice has a lower glycemic index than white rice, meaning that it's digested slower and has less of an impact on blood sugar.

Choosing foods with a lower glycemic index can help those with diabetes better control their blood sugar.

Multiple studies suggest that foods with a higher glycemic index increase blood sugar, insulin and ghrelin, a hormone that drives hunger.

Reducing ghrelin levels may help people with diabetes control their hunger, which can reduce overeating and help keep blood sugar in check.

Plus, replacing white rice with brown rice may reduce the chances of developing type 2 diabetes in the first place.

In a study including over 197,000 people, swapping just 50 grams of white rice for brown rice per week was associated with a 16% lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

SUMMARY

Choosing brown rice over refined grains can help people with diabetes control their blood sugar and reduce the chances of developing diabetes at all.

Brown Rice Is Naturally Gluten-Free

Gluten is a protein found in grains like wheat, barley and rye. These days, more and more people are following gluten-free diets for various reasons.

Certain people are allergic or intolerant to gluten and experience mild to severe reactions to it like stomach pain, diarrhea, bloating and vomiting.

Additionally, people with certain autoimmune diseases often benefit from a gluten-free diet.

These factors have led to a growing demand for gluten-free foods.

Luckily, brown rice is naturally free of this often problematic protein, making it a safe choice for those who can't or choose not to consume gluten.

Unlike highly processed gluten-free items, brown rice is a whole grain that is packed with beneficial nutrients that your body needs to function properly.

Brown rice is also made into other wholesome gluten-free products like crackers and pasta that people on gluten-free diets can enjoy.

SUMMARY

Brown rice does not contain gluten and is a safe and healthy choice for those following gluten-free diets.

How to Add Brown Rice to Your Diet

One of the best qualities of brown rice is its versatility.

You can eat it at any time of day and incorporate it into a variety of recipes.

Here are some ways to add brown rice to your diet:

- Make a grain bowl for lunch with brown rice, veggies and protein
- Top brown rice with eggs, salsa, avocados and black beans for a savory breakfast
- Swap oatmeal for brown rice porridge at breakfast
- Use brown rice instead of white rice when making stir-fries
- Instead of white pasta, incorporate brown rice into your favorite soup recipes
- Toss brown rice with fresh veggies and olive oil for a tasty side dish
- Make black bean and brown rice burgers for a plant-based dinner or lunch
- Use brown rice to make energy bars
- Switch white rice with brown rice for a healthier version of rice pudding
- Ask for brown rice in your sushi rolls to up the fiber content of your meal
- Use brown rice in your curry recipes
- Try a healthy twist on risotto by using brown rice instead of arborio rice
- Swap white pasta with brown rice pasta
- Sauté brown rice with olive oil and garlic for a flavorful carbohydrate option

As you can see, there are countless ways to consume brown rice. This nutritious whole grain pairs well with many ingredients and can be enjoyed at breakfast, lunch or dinner.

SUMMARY

Brown rice is a flexible ingredient that can be enjoyed in various recipes and meals. You can also use it as a healthy replacement for white rice or pasta.

The Bottom Line

Brown rice is a highly nutritious, gluten-free grain that contains an impressive amount of vitamins, minerals and beneficial compounds.

Consuming whole grains like brown rice can help prevent or improve several health conditions, including diabetes and heart disease.

Not to mention, swapping refined grains like white rice for brown rice may even help you lose weight. Brown rice is a versatile carb that can be eaten at any time of day.

Any way you choose to eat this healthy whole grain, you will be making a wise choice for your overall health.