



Brown Rice vs White Rice

Controversy in the nutrition world is about as common as the recommendation to eat more vegetables. Not only can the varied opinions be confusing, but they can actually create more stress around healthy eating than should ever be necessary.

One of the most frustrating forms of this controversy, especially for someone looking for clarity around healthy eating, is the opposing advice “out there” on staple foods such as rice.

If you’re fairly mainstream in your nutritional knowledge, you likely believe, as many people do, that brown rice is healthier than white rice. If you’re into bodybuilding and fitness, you’ve probably heard that white rice spikes your blood sugar more than brown, that it’s more processed (hence its whiteness), and that brown rice has more nutrients, and is thus a smarter choice to make.

Because this is such a popular subject, this article aims to answer some of the most common questions around rice. By the time you’re finished, you’ll see that both rice variations are considered “healthy foods”. You can choose brown just as much as white to achieve different flavor profiles and textures, and (perhaps most importantly) keep the fire in your relationship with rice alive. It is, after all, one of the most foundational foods of a plant-based diet and is used lots in the amazing Ground Leaf recipes.

What makes brown rice different than white rice?

It’s not just the color of the rice that differs, but the processing, the flavor, the nutrient density, and the digestibility, to name a few.

Flavor

Brown rice and white rice have very different tastes and textures. Brown rice tends to have more of a nutty flavor, and a medium to firm, chewy texture. White rice is a little blander, and with its milder flavor, and softer, subtler texture is more of a “blank canvas.” White rice is starchier than brown rice with a stickier texture, partly because the milling process brings out the starchiest part of the grain. (1)

Brown rice can be paired with hearty, flavorful ingredients and dishes. It is easily enjoyed with boldly flavored entrees like spiced lentils, curried potatoes, hearty soups and stews or chili. White rice is generally better combined with more delicately flavored dishes. (2)



Nutrient density and digestibility

As mentioned, word on the street is generally that brown rice is healthier than white rice, but Ground Leaf does not necessarily agree and neither do leading nutrition experts. (3) Brown rice technically does have more nutrients than white rice, but this is because when white rice is milled, it is removed from the bran; this is what actually makes it white. Although the bran of brown rice may increase the nutrient density on paper, the debate is around whether or not those nutrients are actually available to us. Because of the presence of anti-nutrients like phytates in the bran itself the higher levels of nutrients are more difficult for our digestive system to absorb. (4) So, yes, technically speaking, brown rice may have more nutrients, but because of the phytates, our digestive system may not be able to assimilate them.

What's the difference between all the different kinds of white rice?

Short-grain rice is starchier and cooks up to a softer, stickier texture. Because of this, it's generally used in dishes like risotto, paella, and sushi rolls.

Long-grain rice has less starch, so when it's cooked it has more separation. This makes it better used in pilafs or dishes with more sauce as it holds up better than shorter varieties. Both jasmine and basmati are long-grain varieties used for their distinct flavor profiles, so they are frequently used in dishes that complement their respective notes like Indian and Asian foods. (5)

How important is it to buy organic?

Ground Leaf suggests using organic foods whenever possible (as it's not always an option due to cost and availability). With rice, as with all foods, the organic label ensures that pesticides have not been used in the growing process and that the food is free of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). To ensure the optimal quality of your food, organic is always the best choice; but with rice, you'll also find that some of the varieties have "GMO free" on them, which is also a good sign if you can't find or afford organic.

Is arsenic an issue in rice?

There are definitely some sources who are saying that arsenic is a problem in rice, especially in processed rice products. Much of the research has shown that brown rice actually has more arsenic than white, because of the bran, and that rinsing your rice before you eat it can minimize levels of arsenic if you're concerned. (6) Just keep in mind that rinsing rice can affect the outcome of certain recipes. For instance, rinsing Arborio rice before making a risotto can wash away some of the starch that will make the risotto nice and creamy.



Isn't rice really high in carbs?

Rice is definitely high in carbohydrates, but keep in mind that “carbs” are not the enemy; they’re the energy currency for your body and your brain (7). Carbs and starches are not restricted on a whole food, plant-based diet. Be careful of diet fads - healthy starches and carbohydrates play an essential role in balancing diet and energy levels.

Here at Ground Leaf, there is room for both brown and white rice. Variety is key, and eating a whole foods diet necessitates mixing it up, and keeping your daily food fresh and free of constant repetition. This is how you will receive the widest range of nutrition, and also ensure you’re satiated and actually enjoying your food which is essential to the sustainability of any healthy eating program.

Resources:

- 1) <http://wellnessmama.com/2123/white-rice-healthy/>
- 2) <http://tastybite.com/2015/11/white-rice-vs-brown-rice-do-you-know-the-difference/>
- 3) <https://chriskresser.com/arsenic-in-rice-how-concerned-should-you-be/>
- 4) <http://wellnessmama.com/2123/white-rice-healthy/>
- 5) <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/health-fitness/healthy-eating/what-type-of-rice-is-healthiest>
- 6) <http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodborneIllnessContaminants/Metals/ucm319870.htm>
- 7) <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23251132>