**Health Benefits of Red, Brown… and Black… Rice!**

Wa-Wait a minute! *Black rice*!?

Yes you read that right. But let’s start with the relatively more common red and brown varieties of healthy rice, and save the best for the last.

**Why is white rice a not-so-healthy choice?**

The traditional variety of rice, though widely and heavily consumed throughout the world, continues to be a topic of as much debate in health and fitness circles.

Raw rice is milled and hulled, and undergoes a process of refinement which renders it a polished, white, and glossy look. However, this process of refining and milling rice unwittingly removes the two parts of grain that is of utmost significance to health—the bran and the germ—which are rich in dietary fiber as well as nutrients that are beneficial for human health.

It is precisely this fact that makes white rice nutritionally unpopular.

“If white rice undergoes further process of polishing then its aleurone layer gets removed leading to loss of nutrients. This layer is rich in B vitamins, other nutrients and essential fats”, says Delhi-based weight management expert, Dr. Gargi Sharma.

Refined rice is deficient in furthermore essential nutrients like *thiamine*, commonly known as Vitamin B1, and other B-complex vitamins too. Vitamin B1 deficiency could lead to a pathological condition called *beriberi* that results in inflammation of the nerves and heart failure. Also, processed rice is treated with artificial / synthetic / chemical additives that can, in certain cases, harm the human body and trigger metabolic disorders like diabetes, obesity, and more.

“The milling and polishing destroys 67% of the vitamin B3, 80% of the vitamin B1, 90% of the vitamin B6, half of the manganese, half of the phosphorus, 60% of the iron, all of the dietary fiber as well the essential fatty acids present in the raw variety”, says Dr. Ritika Samaddar.

Even after knowing these facts, it would be a tough choice for most people to completely do away with consuming white rice, more of habit than of choice.

This is where colored rice could fill nutritional gaps as a healthy alternative.

**Brown and Red Rice**

Geographically, brown rice is easily available across the globe, whereas red rice is typical to the Himalayan Mountain Range, southern Tibet, Bhutan (eastern Himalayas), as well as southern India.

However, both these varieties of rice share the same harvesting process and nutritional profile—fiber, B vitamins, calcium, zinc and iron, manganese, selenium, and magnesium. “One thing that sets the red variety apart from its brown counterpart is its being enriched with antioxidants that can help fight damaging free radicals in our body", says Dr. Sharma. These antioxidants are technically anthocyanins (also found in deep-purple or reddish fruits and vegetables), which gives red rice its characteristic color.

Both red and brown rice are highly recommended for diabetics, thanks to their low glycemic index, and for heart patients, by virtue of their being whole grains, which reduce arterial plaque, prevent risks of cardiovascular disease (CVD), optimize high levels of cholesterol, and regulate blood sugar. According to recent studies, one cup of brown rice, consumed daily, can significantly lower risk of diabetes by 60%.

However, a certain component in brown rice can cause harm to human health: Phytic Acid. “Phytic acid can hinder iron and calcium absorption. It can happen in cases where you consume brown rice along with food that are rich in calcium or iron”, explains Dr. Gargi Sharma.

**Black Rice:**

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| **Did You Know?**  Black rice was served only to the royals in ancient China, and the consumption of black rice was forbidden to the masses. However, the steady shift in food trends towards healthier options like brown rice, quinoa or sunflower seeds has introduced us to this superfood. These shiny, black grains of rice turn purple when cooked, which is not only a treat to the eyes but also to the taste buds. | Black rice surpasses the red and brown varieties in its wealth of nutrients: fiber, antioxidants, phyto-nutrients, phyto-chemicals, Vitamin E, protein, iron, and other nutrients. It keeps the liver, kidney and stomach healthy, and reduces risk of cancer by virtue of its antioxidant anthocyanins. Its low sugar and glycemic content stabilizes high blood pressure and is also good for diabetic patients. |

“A spoonful of black rice bran contains more health promoting anthocyanins antioxidants than are found in a spoonful of blueberries, but with less sugar, more fiber, vitamins and antioxidants”, says Professor Zhimin Zu.

Including the red, brown and black varieties, over 40,000 different varieties of rice is cultivated and consumed across the globe.