The 411 on Brown Rice

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by Marlo Dublin

Too often brown rice gets a bad rap. This healthy staple is tasty and nutritious, but it's one item that I've noticed is slow to move from food pantry shelves. Since March is National Nutrition Month, here's a primer on the perfect side dish.

"Are brown and white rice the same?"

The 411: Brown rice is considered a whole cereal grain, and is harvested from a type of grass. During harvest, its husk is removed, leaving it with a complete structure that includes a germ, bran and endosperm. When these structures are removed during processing, the result is white rice.

"Is brown rice really healthier than white rice?"

The 411: Yes! Brown rice is a 100% whole grain and packed with nutrients, vitamins and minerals, including fiber, protein and iron. Whole grains can help reduce your risk for heart disease, certain cancers, and help in weight maintenance. Brown rice is also low in fat, calories and sodium, and is gluten, trans-fat and cholesterol free.

"I don't have time to cook brown rice; it takes forever, and comes out mushy or too hard!"

The 411: Water and timing affect the texture of cooked brown rice. It will likely come out mushy if you cook it in too much water for too long, or too hard if you don't cook it in enough water for enough time. Use these easy cooking methods, both of which serve 3-4 people, for the best results:

Stovetop:
Bring 2½ cups water to a boil and stir in 1 cup of brown rice. Then, cover your pan and reduce heat to simmer rice for about 40 minutes. When most of the water has been absorbed by rice, turn the heat off and finish steam cooking rice in the pot with the lid on. In 5-10 minutes, the rice will be cooked and fluffy when stirred.

1100 Watt microwave:
Combine 1 cup of brown rice and 3 cups of water in a 2½-quart microwave-safe dish. Microwave uncovered on high heat for 10 minutes. Reduce power to 50% and continue microwaving rice uncovered for 20 minutes. Allow rice to sit for 5 minutes; fluff with a fork and serve.

"Brown rice is expensive!"

The 411: Research shows that a two-pound bag of long grain white rice can cost $2.69, while the same size bag of long grain brown rice can cost $2.79. For ten cents more, opting to buy brown rice can improve the nutritional quality of our meals.

"My family doesn't like brown rice. They say it tastes funny."

The 411: Combine cooked brown rice with white rice as a way to get used to its wholesome and nutty texture. Over time, add more brown rice in place of the white rice until you are eating it on its own! Or, stir in a splash of coconut milk towards the end of the cooking time to add a tropical flavor to the rice.

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