

Is white rice bad for me? Can I make it lower glycemic index or healthier?

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Rice is a [culinary staple](#) in Australia and around the world.

It might seem like a given that [brown rice](#) is healthier than white and

official [public health resources](#) often recommend brown rice instead of white as a "healthy swap."

But [Australians definitely prefer white rice](#) over brown. So what's the difference, and what do we need to know when choosing rice?

What makes rice white or brown?

Rice "grains" are technically seeds. A complete, whole rice seed is called a "paddy," which has [multiple parts](#):

1. the "hull" is the hard outer layer which protects the seed
2. the "bran," which is a softer protective layer containing the seed coat
3. the "germ" or the embryo, which is the part of the seed that would develop into a new plant if was germinated
4. the "endosperm," which makes up most of the seed and is essentially the store of nutrients that feeds the developing plant as a seed grows into a plant.

Rice needs to be [processed](#) for humans to eat it.

Along with cleaning and drying, the hard hulls are removed since we can't digest them. This is how [brown rice is made](#), with the other three parts of the rice remaining intact. This means brown rice is regarded as a "whole grain."

White rice, however, is a "refined" grain, as it is [further polished](#) to remove the bran and germ, leaving just the endosperm. This is a mechanical and not a [chemical process](#).

What's the difference, nutritionally?

Keeping the bran and the germ means [brown rice has more](#) magnesium, phosphorus, potassium B vitamins (niacin, folate, riboflavin and pyridoxine), iron, zinc and fiber.

The germ and the bran also contain more bioactives (compounds in foods that aren't [essential nutrients](#) but have [health benefits](#)), like [oryzanols and phenolic compounds](#) which have antioxidant effects.

But that doesn't mean [white rice](#) is just empty calories. It [still contains](#) vitamins, minerals and some fiber, and is low in fat and salt, and is naturally gluten-free.

White and brown rice actually have [similar](#) amounts of calories (or kilojoules) and total carbohydrates.

There are studies that show eating more white rice is linked to [a higher risk](#) of type 2 diabetes. But it is difficult to know if this is down to the rice itself, or other related factors such as socioeconomic variables or other dietary patterns.

What about the glycemic index?

The higher fiber means brown rice has a [lower glycemic index](#) (GI), meaning it raises blood sugar levels more slowly. But this is highly variable between different rices within the white and brown categories.

The [GI system](#) uses low (less than 55), medium (55–70) and high (above 70) categories. [Brown rices](#) fall into the low and medium categories. [White rices](#) fall in the medium and high.

There are specific [low-GI types available](#) for both white and brown types. You can also lower the GI of rice by [heating and then cooling it](#). This process converts some of the available carbohydrates into resistant

starch, which then functions like dietary fiber.

Are there any benefits to white rice?

The [taste and textural qualities](#) of white and brown rices differ. White rice tends to have a softer texture and more mild or neutral flavor.

Brown rice has a chewier texture and nuttier flavor.

So, while you can technically substitute brown rice into most recipes, the experience will be different. Or other ingredients may need to be added or changed to create the desired texture.

Removing more of the outer layers may also reduce the levels of [contaminants](#) such as pesticides.

We don't just eat rice

Comparing white and brown rice seems like an easy way to boost nutritional value. But just because one food (brown rice) is more nutrient-dense doesn't make the other food (white rice) "bad."

Ultimately, it's not often that we eat just rice, so we don't need the rice we choose to be the perfect one. Rice is typically the staple base of a more complex dish. So, it's probably more important to think about what we eat with rice.

Adding vegetables and lean proteins to rice-based dishes can easily add the micronutrients, bioactives and fiber that white rice is comparatively lacking, and this can likely do more to contribute to diet quality than eating brown rice instead.

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