

Ubiquitous rice and its rare cures

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

In some Asian cultures, rice is a symbol of life and fertility. Marrying couples are blessed by sprinkling grains of rice on their heads during the wedding. Rice is the most common grain on earth and is the staple for over half of the world's population. India is the second largest producer of rice and the enormous amount of bran left after the refining process has created a new industry of extracting bran oil, which has contents similar to peanut oil.

This oil is very rich in phytosterol and tocopherol (vitamin E) and is a good at reducing blood cholesterol levels). According to the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, what started as a simple rice by-product is becoming a valid alternative to traditional oil.

A study carried out in Bangkok showed that a diet of whole grain rice reduces anaemia caused by white rice, if accompanied by vitamin C-rich fresh fruits and vegetables. This is because vitamin C enhances absorption of iron from vegetable sources and its effect more than compensates for the inhibiting effect of phytates contained in its bran.

From a nutritional standpoint, the practice of eating rice with lemon and vegetable is highly beneficial. Although the most popular of all grains, it is the least nutritious, especially if it is polished. It is low in protein (only 7 per cent) and it is deficient in lysine and tryptophan – two essential amino acids found in legumes in abundance.

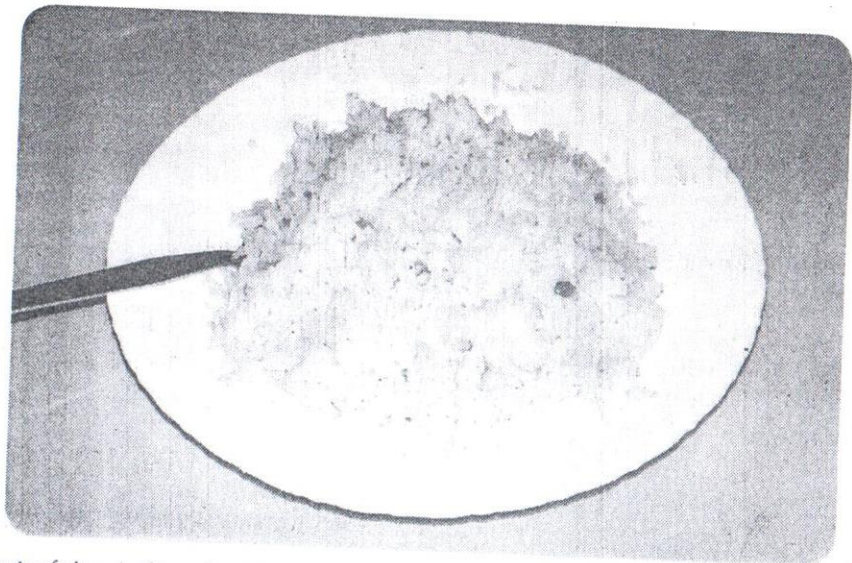
Whole rice contains unsaturated fatty acids, which have great biological value although in very small amounts, at 2.7 per cent. Whole grain rice contains significant

amounts of vitamin B1 and E, which are absent in white rice. A staple food of only white rice causes vitamin B1 deficiency – a disease called beriberi. White rice has virtually no fats and 80 per cent of it is starch. It is deficient in vitamin A and C.

Medically, rice is useful in controlling diarrhoea. White rice boiled with a little oil and salt – eaten together with apple and yoghurt – should be the first solid foods after a bout of diarrhoea.

Rice is also good at restoring intestinal mucosa after colitis or gastroenteritis. Rice water is ideal fluid for oral re-hydration in case of diarrhoea, particularly for children. It may be given as the only beverage, adding a few drops of lemon juice if desired. In addition to fluid re-hydration, rice water provides mineral salts and starch, which keep diarrhoea at bay.

A study in 1991 reported in the *England Journal of Medicine* at the University of Costa Rica compared the effects of the clas-



sic glucose-based re-hydration solutions with rice water. Infants suffering from acute diarrhoea and dehydration improved much faster when given rice water than glucose water.

Rice water is prepared by boiling two tablespoonfuls of rice in one litre of water until the rice begins to disintegrate. Let the liquid stand until cool, then strain. It may be flavoured by adding a cinnamon stick and/or lemon peel or a few drops of lemon.

Whole grain rice lowers cholesterol by impeding the absorption of biliary acids in the intestines because of its high fibre content. These acids are the raw materials used by the liver to produce cholesterol. Rice is recommended in gout and arthritis because of its very low protein content and its alkalisating effect, which facilitates loss of uric acid.

Bran of rice has anti-nutritive phytates that inhibit the absorption of iron and calcium.

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