All rice varieties contain carbohydrates, protein, trace amounts of fat and sodium, and are gluten free. Whole-grain rice contains more protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals than white rice, and colored varieties boast more antioxidants. While whole-grain rice is preferred for its inherently better nutrition profile, the nutrients added to enriched white rice — niacin, thiamin, folic acid and iron — are important to the diet, too.

Emerging research shows that rice, both white and brown, is a source of resistant starch, which increases total dietary fiber and lowers the glycemic response due to slower digestion. Resistant starch quantities vary depending on the type of rice and cooking methods used.

The shape and length of the rice kernel (short-grain, medium-grain or long-grain) determines its texture when cooked, in addition to the appropriate types of dishes and cuisines. Long-grain, which cooks light and fluffy with the kernels separated, is often used for making pilafs, stuffings, rice salads and jambalaya. Medium-grain rice is moist and tender and commonly used for making paella and risotto. With shorter, rounder kernels, short-grain rice cooks up moist and “sticky,” making it a great option for rice puddings, desserts and eating with chopsticks.

Rice is often consumed with other nutrient-rich foods such as fruits, vegetables, legumes (beans and peas), nuts, seeds, lean meat, poultry and seafood. It is also a low-cost, versatile cooking ingredient that is easy to prepare, stretches the food budget and can carry the flavors of any global cuisine.