

A grain of truth (about rice)

Did you know that on average, each Australian consumes 10 to 12 kg rice each year? That's about 200 grams a week. Are you above or below average when it comes to eating rice?

We're not huge rice eaters and fall below that average. I prefer brown rice not only for its chewy texture and nutty flavour but also because it has a superior fibre and vitamin profile than any white rice. But the down side is brown rice takes so much longer to cook than white rice and it's a challenge to cook just enough. So how do I get around that?

I go for convenience.

And this same convenience works if you enjoy rice but end up eating too much because it's there (you cook too much) or you struggle to cook just enough for one meal.

Help is at hand.

It's brilliantly convenient to manage serve size and portions no matter what your goal or reason: weight loss, single diners, carbohydrate counters (for diabetes or other carb-controlled plans), athletes, and time-poor healthy.

I'm talking about the 'single' serve tubs and pouches of pre-cooked rice found at the large supermarket chains in the rice aisle.

To save you a label-reading headache, I've summarised the nutrient panels of single-serve rices into a table ([Part 2 linked here](#)), added some comments below, and marked my top picks in the table with green stars.

Points to note

- **All 'single' serves packs are too big to be classed as single serves!** Sounds like a contradiction doesn't it? My book "this=that: a life-size photo guide to food serves" recommends a single serve of rice contains about 550-600 kJ. This aligns very well with the official Eat for Health Australian Dietary Guidelines, which suggest 500-600 kJ per serve. The range of microwave rice packs starts at 670 kJ and top out at almost double that at 1250 kJ for a 'single' serve.
- If your goal is to **lose weight or prevent weight gain** and the rice is part of a main meal, choose any variety but split the single tub or pouch into two serves. Pad out the plate with 'light' vegetables - frozen is great if both convenience and speed are important.
- If your goal is to **lose weight or prevent weight gain** and the rice is for lunch, eat any full tub or pouch and add a protein rich food for longer-lasting fullness. A few greens (salad or cooked vegetables) wouldn't go astray either. This is close to eating a sandwich or wrap.
- If your goal is to **skip sodium salt**, rice ought to be an obvious choice but many of these convenience rices have added salty seasonings. The best choices have much less than 150 mg sodium, ideally less than 6 mg sodium, per tub or pouch.

- If you need to **watch your carbohydrate intake**, take care because the carb-content varies widely between brands and flavours from as little as 29.5 grams through to 67.5 grams in a tub or pouch. You have no choice but to check the pack you buy each time. The glycemic index remains unreported for most of these products and so is not included in the table.
- If fibre is your friend because **constipation is your concern**, one product stands out for fibre content but it's not pure rice inside. The addition of chia in SunRice's Quick Cups Brown Rice & Chia Steamed Rice bumps the fibre up to massive 7.1 g per tub. The good news is that any product with 3 or more grams fibre in a tub or pouch is good.
- If **gluten free eating** is essential, take care with flavoured rices because some contain soy sauce (wheat) when you least expect it. Soy sauce in Asian sounding (stir-fried and fried) rices makes sense but in Spanish or chicken flavoured rice? You'd be surprised what it's in. Flavoured and seasoned rice is not automatically okay for strict gluten-free dining so, as always, check the ingredient list.



To help you make a quick pick, I've added a dark green star against my top picks. I've also added a pale star against one product that doesn't list its fibre content but it will make my list because it's brown rice and low in sodium.

What do *I personally* choose for home? Any tub or sachet of plain brown rice; usually there's one on special. Plain, unflavoured quick brown rice is versatile.

How much do *I serve* at home? We split the tub roughly so I get 1/3 and 'his appetite' gets 2/3 as a small accompaniment to saucy meals such as Indian curries and Asian-style meals.

For your interest, I am not affiliated with any of the brands listed. This review is independent and of a general nature only. Please check with your dietitian if you have special dietary needs.

How do the flavoured rices compare with cafe and restaurant take-away rices or frozen rice (Asian and Indian style)? Find out in a future newsletter.

Be sure to check out Part 2 for my pantry recommendations.

About the author:

Trudy Williams is an Accredited Practising Dietitian with FoodTalk. Her *"this=that: life-size photo guide to food serves"* books for adults and children are award-winning.

The books are full of photos that show correct serve sizes. It's much easier compare food serves and see the right serve when you see a life-size photo. Visit FoodTalk.com.au for more information.

Sources:

1. Each Australian consumes 10 kg rice per annum (<http://superbrands.com.au/index.php/all-volumes/79-volume-2/286-sun-rice-vol-2>)
2. Australians consume about 11.75 kg of rice (and rice grain fractions) per annum. That's about grams 32.2 grams each day (mean daily intake) (43640DO005_20112012 Australian Health Survey: Nutrition First Results – Foods and Nutrients, 2011–12 — Australia).
3. "this=that: a life-size photo guide to food serves" by Trudy Williams
4. Eat for Health Australian Dietary Guidelines at <http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au>

Table information compiled from manufacturer's data available online and on shelves. To be read with accompanying table Part 2. Oct 2014 by Trudy Williams, Accredited Practising Dietitian at FoodTalk.com.au