

# THREE SEASONS AYURVEDA



The first time I ever heard of “kitchari” was during my preparation for my first Panchakarma (the Ayurvedic cleansing and rejuvenation process) treatment at the Ayurvedic Institute in New Mexico.

Kitchari (pronounced kich-ah-ree and sometimes spelled khichadi) is a staple of Indian cuisine and Ayurvedic medicine. It was first used to nourish babies, the elderly, and the sick, and it became the main food source during detoxification because it removes toxins stored in bodily tissues, restores systemic balance, has a high nutritional value with substantial protein, and is easy to digest.

The term kitchari is used to describe any dish made with a mixture of rice and beans and is sometimes referred to as Indian risotto. There are many combinations of legumes, rice’s, and grains that can be used depending on your individual constitution, seasonal considerations, and digestive needs, but at its purest form it is a blend of yellow split moong dal (beans), basmati rice, spices, and vegetables.

Ayurveda believes that all healing begins with the digestive tract, and Kitchari can give it a much-needed rest from constantly processing different foods while providing essential nutrients. The blend of rice and split mung beans have the qualities of being sweet and cooling with a sweet aftertaste. Together they create a balanced food that offers an array of amino acids, the building blocks of protein. Its mixture of spices is believed to kindle the digestive fire “Agni,” which can be weakened by poor food combinations.

Below are the basic ingredients of kitchari:

## **Ghee**

Ghee is clarified butter and has been a staple of Indian cooking for centuries (it was first documented in the 17th century in the Ayurvedic text written by *Bhavaprakasha*). Ghee also transcends the cooking realm, often used in religious ceremonies and various healing arts in Indian culture.

*“Ghee is sweet in taste and cooling in energy, rejuvenating, good for the eyes and vision, kindles digestion, bestows luster and beauty, enhances memory and stamina, increases intellect, promotes longevity, is an aphrodisiac, and protects the body from various diseases.”* Bhavaprakasha

The process of clarifying butter is called rendering. When the butter melts it separates into three parts: The foam that comes to the top is the water, the milk solids move to the bottom, and the pure fat in the middle is the ghee.

Ghee contains a balance of easy-to-digest essential fatty acids needed for healthy cells. The wondrous benefits of ghee may seem contradictory based on what we have heard about butter, but we know that poor-quality fats (i.e. heat-treated, solvent-extracted, trans and hydrogenated fats) cause the production of free radicals that damage cells due to oxidation, endangering our health.

In general ghee is rich in antioxidants and aids in the absorption of vitamins and minerals from other foods, feeding all layers of the body’s tissues and serving to strengthen the immune system. Ghee improves memory, makes the body flexible, and lubricates the all connective tissues. Ghee also has a high concentration of butyric acid, a fatty acid that contains anti-viral properties.

Ayurveda uses ghee for its beneficial effects on digestion, and it is a natural carrier for the nutrients in medicinal herbs. In addition during Panchakarma, it is also used as internal *oileation*, a process of ingesting increasing amounts of ghee over a series of mornings, which helps pull fat soluble toxins out of the cells and triggers fat metabolism, a process whereby the body begins to burn its own fat for fuel.

## **Moong Dal**

Mung or moong beans are known in India as *dal* and were first domesticated in India around 1500 BC. They are small, cylindrical beans with a bright green skin. There are two main types of moong dal: one with the green hulls on, and the more easily digestible split yellow moong dal.

According to Ayurvedic food energetics, moong dal are sweet, astringent, and cooling in nature, are good for all the doshas, and do not increase intestinal gas and bloating.

These beans are a high source of protein and fiber supporting healthy blood sugar levels and colon health. They purify the blood and are highly effective in blocking the oxidation of the LDL cholesterol particles due to their powerful antioxidant properties. They are packed with vitamins; A, C, K, E, B6, B12, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, foliate, pantothenic acid, and choline, and contain calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, sodium, zinc, copper, manganese, and selenium.

## **Rice**

There are many views on where rice originated in the world, but in India rice was mentioned in the Vedas (first documents of India) around 5,000 years ago.

Ayurveda prefers using white rice. Yes, it is true that brown rice (with the hulls attached) does have a few more nutrients and roughage, but white rice is easier to digest and assimilate into the body, especially during cleansing and detoxification when the metabolism slows down and the digestive strength weakens. Additionally, long grain white rice is preferable to short grain rice because it was believed to be more nutritious and has a lower glycemic index than short grain rice.

Rice, like most grains, is very low in the amino acids and is not a good source of protein but with the addition of legumes and lentils the body can make a complete protein. It takes 20 amino acids that combine with one another to make the proteins the body needs. The body can synthesize ten of them on its own, but the body does not make the other ten, called essential amino acids, and it must get those ten from our foods. Animal proteins are “complete” in that they contain all ten essential amino acids, but plant foods need to be combined to make a complete protein.

White rice is about 90% carbohydrate, 8% protein and 2% fat. It contains vitamin E, B6, thiamin, niacin, foliate, pantothenic acid, choline, calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, zinc, copper, manganese, selenium, and fluoride.

## **Spices**

The foundation of kitchari is the moong beans, rice, and ghee but the spices are its soul. When using combinations of spices and herbs, you can not only make your meal delicious but you can insure proper digestion, assimilation, and elimination incorporating their medicinal qualities and properties

Ayurveda's foundation is in the five great elements (ether, air, fire, water, and earth), which are understood by ten opposite qualities (gunas) found in our environments: hot-cold, wet-dry, heavy-light, mobile-stable, etc. The three doshas or constitutions (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) are combinations of the elements and can be controlled or changed by the use of opposite qualities to reduce their natures. All spices and herbs have these energetic qualities along with biomedical actions that can affect and treat a specific dosha, bringing balance and harmony.

The digestive process starts as soon as food comes into contact with the tongue. The receptors on the tongue identify each of the six tastes (sweet, sour, salty, pungent, bitter, and astringent) which in turn stimulates the different stages of our digestive, assimilation, and elimination processes, stokes the digestive fire (agni) and helps to reduce ama (toxins from poor food combining and improper digestion).

Most spice blends start with a foundation of fennel, coriander, and cumin because of their basic digestive and assimilation qualities. Add other specific spices based on their tastes and medicinal qualities to further balance your constitution and target individual concerns and conditions.

When choosing spices and herbs, start with the base spices above and then consider the following: The Vata dosha requires warmth, wetness, heaviness, and stability, so consider using cardamom, basil, and rosemary. The Pitta dosha needs coolness, dryness, heaviness, and stability, so you could choose dill and/or mint. The Kapha dosha requires more heat, dryness, lightness, and mobility, so use fenugreek, cinnamon, and ginger. There are of course many more spices and herbs to consider. depending on your preferences and possible needs.

Ayurveda believes that all disease and disharmony starts with digestion so making an individualized spice blend is not only an inexpensive way to start affecting basic health concerns but is a way to introduce holistic health and medicine naturally and deliciously into your life.

It is recommended and preferable when using spices to first cook them, in whatever fat you are using, to release the essential oils. For instance when making kitchari or a stir-fry, place the fat in the pan and cook the spices in that fat for a minute or two before adding the other foods. Using spices and herbs after cooking is fine and a good practice but cooking them will increase their medicinal attributes.

### **Kitchari for Cleansing**

When considering a cleanse it is imperative to consider how the cleanse affects blood sugar levels. Many cleanses over-purify the body by resorting to drinking only water, vinegar, infusions of pungent spices, juices or consuming only vegetables. This can strain and deplete blood sugar reserves, making you really hungry and irritable, and possibly bringing on a low-blood-sugar headache. The goal is to shift the body toward fat metabolism, which does not happen when under stress.

The goal of any effective cleanse is to convince the body and the cells to burn stored fat and release toxins naturally. During a kitchari cleanse, you are eating a complete protein three meals a day, so there is no starvation response, which in turn does not create stress or anxiety, and your body will process and burn more fat for optimal health.

Kitchari provides solid nourishment in the form of a complete protein that keeps the blood sugar stable while allowing the body to devote energy to healing. You can safely subsist on kitchari anytime in order to build vitality and strength, as it helps balance all three doshas.



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