



# Your guide to **RISOTTO**

There's no need to deprive yourself of this creamy, indulgent-tasting favourite. Our nutrition experts help you choose the best ingredients and show you how to stir up a satisfying meal with endless variations

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IF THERE'S ONE DISH ON A RESTAURANT MENU guaranteed to bring carbo-phobes and waistline watchers out in a cold sweat, it's risotto. But that's not to say it's unhealthy - far from it. This creamy Italian classic has all the potential for a nutritious one-pot meal. Rice is naturally low in fat so makes an ideal base for meals, but it's the ingredients you choose and how you put them together that count.

'Ready-made and restaurant risottos often contain lots of oil, butter, cream and cheese, which add calories and saturates, making many of them unhealthy,' says HFG expert and dietitian Helen Bond. But ditching the bad stuff doesn't mean you can't stir up a creamy dish.

'Use the right sort of rice to help you to get that velvety texture without butter or cream - the best is medium or short-grain,' says HFG recipe consultant Phil

Mundy. 'These varieties contain the rice starch amylopectin, which breaks down when you stir it, making the rice sticky and giving it that classic soft, creamy texture.'

You'll still need to watch portions, though, as these varieties tend to have a higher GI, says HFG nutrition consultant Juliette Kellow. 'Add plenty of lower-GI foods, such as vegetables, to balance things out and avoid a short-lived rise in blood glucose levels,' she says. 'Protein-packed ingredients such as chicken or prawns will also help to lower the total GI of the meal. And try brown rice and other grains with a lower GI, such as spelt or barley.'

To cut calories and fat from a risotto, go easy on the oil. There's no need to add loads at the start, as some recipes suggest. And, rather than using large amounts of cheese, add a small sprinkle of parmesan, which goes a long way in the flavour stakes.

# 1 First choose your rice...

## THE CLASSIC CHOICE



**RISOTTO RICE** There's a reason this is considered the key to a creamy result – risotto rice absorbs more liquid than other varieties (up to three times more in volume instead of the usual two) without going mushy. The best comes from Italy: arborio, a short, fat grain grown in the rice fields of the Po Valley, is the most commonly used variety. Carnaroli is even starchier and creamier, but lighter and more delicate.

**HFG recommends**  
Riso Gallo Arborio Risotto Rice (£2.29/500g, widely available) **Budget buy**  
Asda Arborio Risotto Rice (£1.10/500g)

## THE WHOLESOME OPTION



**BROWN SHORT GRAIN RICE** For a higher-fibre version of risotto use brown rice, but make sure it's short grain – the type of starch in long grain varieties doesn't gelatinise when cooked, so the grains remain separate.

**HFG recommends**  
Neal's Yard Wholefoods Short Grain Brown Rice (£1.75/500g Holland & Barrett)

## THE ALTERNATIVES



**BARLEY** Pearl barley is polished and processed but, unlike most grains, the fibre in barley is distributed throughout the grain so it's not removed when processed. A spongy texture that tastes great with orange veg: squash, pumpkin, sweet potatoes and carrots. Soak for at least an hour before cooking.

**HFG recommends**  
Sainsbury's Pearl Barley (55p/500g)



**FARRO/SPELT** This ancient wheat grain looks similar to pearl barley, but it's nutty and chewy, with a couscous-like taste. It's high in fibre and contains more protein than other grains, plus it provides bone-building phosphorus and manganese. Great with wild mushrooms.

**HFG recommends**  
Sharpham Park Organic Pearled Spelt (£2.99/500g, Waitrose, Ocado)



**BUCKWHEAT/KASHA** This nutty flavoured grain contains a wide range of nutrients, including vitamins B1, B3 and B6, phosphorus, selenium and zinc, and is high in copper and manganese. Delicious with tomato-based recipes – soak overnight for best results.

**HFG recommends**  
Tesco Wholefoods Buckwheat (£1.90/500g)



**QUINOA** This contains all the essential amino acids, making it a complete protein source and therefore an excellent choice for vegans. It's also high in iron and, like rice, is gluten free. Wash well before cooking to remove bitterness and perk it up with tasty ingredients – it needs lots of flavour.

**HFG recommends**  
Neal's Yard Wholefoods Quinoa (£4.79/500g, Holland & Barrett)

## THE PANIC SUBSTITUTE



**PUDDING RICE** If you run out of proper risotto rice, you could try pudding rice, but watch that you don't overcook it. As it's a short grain rice, almost all of the starch is in the form of amylopectin, so it goes really sticky.

**HFG recommends**  
Tesco pudding rice (99p/500g)



## 2 Make your base

### HFG risotto

PREP 5 MIN COOK 40 MIN SERVES 4

1.75 litre hot reduced-salt vegetable stock  
1tbsp vegetable oil  
1 onion, finely chopped  
1 celery stick and some celery leaves, finely chopped  
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped  
400g aborio rice  
250ml dry white wine  
4tbsp grated parmesan or vegetarian alternative  
Fresh parsley, chopped, to garnish

- 1 Heat the stock in a pan and keep it simmering.
- 2 In a separate, heavy-bottomed pan, heat the oil and slowly fry the onion, celery and garlic on a very low heat until translucent (using less oil than standard recipes means this can take about 15 min).
- 3 Add the rice, then turn up the heat and stir until all the grains are coated and mixed with the onion mixture. Add the wine gradually, stirring all the time, allowing each addition to be

absorbed before adding more.

- 4 Turn down the heat, then slowly add the hot stock, one ladleful at a time. Keep stirring and add another ladleful as soon as the liquid is absorbed. Keep adding the stock and stirring until the rice is soft and creamy but still has a bite. This should take around 20 min from first adding the wine.

- 5 Season with freshly ground black pepper, then stir in the

cheese, followed by your additional ingredients (see right).

- 6 Turn off the heat, then cover the pan and leave for a couple of min to allow the creaminess to develop. Serve garnished with the parsley.



#### PER SERVING (BASE RECIPE)

- |                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| ● 515kcal        | ● 3.5g sugar    |
| ● 11.1g protein  | ● 1.4g fibre    |
| ● 8.8g fat       | ● 2.7g salt     |
| ● 2.6g saturates | ● 121mg calcium |
| ● 93.8g carbs    | ● 1mg iron      |

### COOK'S TIPS

- **NO-WASH CHOICE**  
Never rinse risotto rice as this will lower the level of starch – and reduce the creaminess of the finished dish.
- **STOCK SOLUTION**  
To help reduce the salt content, use lower-salt stock cubes and powder. We like Marigold Swiss Vegetable Reduced

Salt Bouillon Powder (£2/ 150g, Tesco).

- **BIG FILLER** Risotto's full of energy-giving starchy carbs, but get a boost of protein, too (plus minerals such as selenium and zinc), by including chicken, prawns, scallops, crab, walnuts and hazelnuts.
- **SPECIAL DIETS**  
Although it's a natural choice for gluten-free

and vegetarian diets, you'll need to make sure you use a stock that's free from gluten and/or parmesan-style vegetarian cheese in place of traditional Parmigiano Reggiano (which contains animal rennet).

- **LAZY OPTION**  
If you're more interested in flavour than a creamy texture,

you can always add all the liquid in one go. Then bring to the boil, turn down the heat and pop a lid on the pot for a quicker cook.

- **DON'T EAT IT PIPING HOT** It tastes better when it's allowed to rest for a minute or two – Italians often spread it over their plate, from the centre out, to let steam escape.

## 3 Now add your flavours

WE LOVE THESE COMBINATIONS. Always add extra veg, too: mushrooms, asparagus, green beans, leeks, peas, butternut squash, pumpkin, courgettes, broad beans, broccoli, cauliflower, spinach and fennel are great choices. Top with a handful of rocket or roasted cherry tomatoes or serve with a side salad for even more.

### SEAFOOD



Waitrose Essential Cooked King Prawns (£4.23/235g), thawed and chopped

Red chilli to taste, thinly sliced

### CHILD-FRIENDLY



2 x 200g tins Sainsbury's Skipjack Tuna Steak In Spring Water (£1.30), drained

198g tin Green Giant Naturally Sweet Sweetcorn (no added salt or sugar) (65p)

### TIME-SAVING CHEATS



OR



OR



M&S Count on Us Chargrilled Chicken & Asparagus Risotto (£3/385g)

Riso Gallo Riso Pronto Porcini Mushroom (£2.29/175g)

Waitrose Frozen Luxurious & Creamy Seafood Risotto (£5.99/1.2kg)

### MEAT



4 slices Tesco From The Deli Roast Turkey Slices (£2.30/4 slices), chopped

Tesco Just Wild Rocket Salad (£1/70g)

### VEGETARIAN



500g bag Morrisons Ready Chopped Stir Fry Vegetables (£1), thawed

300g tin Morrisons Garden Peas (38p), drained

### PLUS A DOLLOP OF...



OR



Sainsbury's Fat Free Normandy Natural Fromage Frais (£1.10p/500g)

Total 0% Fat Authentic Greek Yoghurt (£1/170g)

### OTHER TASTY COMBOS

- Cauliflower florets, walnuts and garlic
- Pumpkin and sage
- Roasted butternut squash, mushrooms and red wine
- Grated cooked beetroot, green beans and garlic
- Smoked haddock, sweetcorn and peas