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Rice Eaters are Healthy Eaters

New Research Presented at the American Dietetic Association Annual Meeting

PHILADELPHIA, PA, October 1, 2007 -- People who eat rice have more nutritious diets that are higher in 12 essential vitamins and minerals, including folic acid, potassium and vitamin C and lower in saturated fat and added sugar, than the diets of non-rice eaters, according to a new study presented at the American Dietetic Association Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo 2007 (FNCE) taking place in Philadelphia this week. The study also shows that rice eaters have a lower risk of high blood pressure and of being overweight, and may have a reduced risk of heart disease, type II diabetes and metabolic syndrome.

"We saw a trend toward healthier eating and more favorable risk factors for disease, such as lower blood pressure and waist circumference for all age groups, with the most significant findings among adults aged 19-50," said study contributor Julie Upton, MS, RD, who presented the data at the FNCE meeting. "This is good news for Americans looking to make a change in their diet because it suggests that adding rice to the diet may promote healthier food choices."

The primary objectives of the research were to identify rice consumption patterns among U.S. adults and children and to determine the nutritional contribution of rice to the diet and the relationship of rice consumption to specific health parameters, including anthropometrics, blood pressure, blood lipids, and risk for metabolic syndrome using 1999-2004 data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). Utilizing these datasets, individuals who reported consuming at least 14 grams of white rice, brown rice, or rice flour were identified as "rice consumers."

Nearly 26 percent of consumers in the survey sample reported eating rice during the 24-hour recall period, making it a significant part of the American diet. Several differences in total diet intake were observed, with the most statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$) noted among adults aged 19-50 years old. Compared to non-consumers of rice, individuals who eat rice (white or brown) consume:

- Less total fat, saturated fat and added sugars;
- Higher amounts of over 12 essential vitamins and minerals, including iron, folate and other B-vitamins;
- A higher quality diet including more fruit and legumes; and
- Nearly 4 teaspoons (16 g) less added sugar and 7 grams less solid fats.

In addition, adults aged 19-50 ($p < 0.05$) who eat rice:

- Are less likely to be overweight/obese;
- Have a 34 percent reduced risk of high blood pressure;
- Are 27 percent less likely to have an increased waist circumference; and
- Have a 21 percent reduced risk of metabolic syndrome.

“We know that rice is the foundation of a healthful diet in many other parts of the world, including Asia and the Mediterranean. This study demonstrates a similar pattern among rice eaters in the U.S.,” says Upton. “In light of today’s obesity epidemic, data showing that rice eaters have a better diet quality than non-rice eaters, and that they have better health parameters, is good news for people who are looking to adopt healthier eating habits and maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle. In addition, we know that rice partners well with foods we like to encourage, like vegetables, legumes and lean protein.”

The diets of rice eaters are more consistent with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines which recommend that Americans eat a healthy balance of nutrient-dense foods, increase consumption of vegetables and fruits, limit saturated and trans fats, sodium and cholesterol, and watch their caloric intake. The Guidelines also recommend that people consume three or more ounce-equivalents of whole grain products, such as brown rice, per day, with the rest of the recommended grains coming from enriched or whole-grain products, such as white rice. A half cup of cooked brown or white rice equals one ounce-equivalent.

The American Dietetic Association Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo is the largest nutrition conference in the world. It attracts more than 10,000 registered dietitians and nutrition scientists hungry for cutting-edge research across the spectrum of the field of dietetics – from trends in weight management and children's nutrition to the latest findings related to disease-fighting nutrients to new health foods that may wind up in your grocery cart in the near future. Julie Upton, a nationally recognized registered dietitian specializing in nutrition, fitness and health, presented the findings to the leadership of the Sports, Cardiovascular and Wellness Nutritionists – one of the largest and most prestigious practice groups within American Dietetic Association.

For great-tasting healthy recipes and more information on the health benefits of rice, visit the USA Rice Federation at www.usarice.com.

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The USA Rice Federation is the national advocate for all segments of the rice industry, conducting programs to build awareness and usage of U.S.-grown rice. Arkansas, California, Florida, Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, and Missouri produce high-quality varieties of short, medium and long grain rice, as well as specialty rices including jasmine, basmati, arborio, red aromatic and black japonica, among others.

Rice. A World of Great Ideas