

Kitchari: A Nourishing Cleanse



Kitchari is a classic Indian stew with a porridge-like consistency made with a base of white basmati rice and mung beans (although other beans and lentils are often used). It's food as medicine at it's finest. It supports all the eliminatory pathways in the body, boosts metabolic fire, and provides a re-set to your digestive system, especially if it's feeling sluggish and overwhelmed. It can be helpful for emotional feelings of overwhelm too, as well as excessive anger and frustration, all of which often arise in the spring, which is a traditional time to do a kitchari cleanse.

This medicinal stew is classically utilized in Ayurveda, the ancient medicine system of India, as a gentle and nourishing cleanse by fasting on just kitchari for anywhere from 3-10 days. The spices and ghee are central here, and the well-cooked rice and mung beans provide easy to digest nutritional support while the spices and ghee do their work of stoking the digestive fire (called *agni* in Ayurveda), helping the body remove accumulated metabolic waste (called *ama* in Ayurveda) and giving the eliminatory organs like the liver, kidneys, lungs, and skin some extra support. In Ayurveda accumulated excess *ama* is seen as the root of all disease. It's important to remember that our body produces metabolic waste, often called "toxins" in natural health circles, as a by-product of normal cellular function and this kind of a cleanse isn't at all coming from a framework of "my body is toxic," which is, unfortunately, how so many cleanses are approached. Rather, after a winter of eating heavy foods, with less movement and sunlight, your body often just needs a gentle wake-up, which kitchari can provide, without waging an all-out war on your body and all of its perceived "dirtiness" and "toxins" that most traditional cleanses espouse. When we're coming at our health from

an angle of loving and appreciating our body and giving it what it needs to heal and revitalize, like in a kitchari fast, rather than coming at it from a perceived place of “I’m toxic” we have a much larger capacity to truly heal. It’s about self-love rather than self-hatred. For all these reasons, kitchari is just about the only cleanse- even though I am still sometimes rather loath to use that word because of all the baggage it carries-I ever do or recommend to my clients. It’s about nourishing the body, helping it out, and giving it what it needs to heal itself, recognizing that it’s *normal* to have waste products in the body simply by being human! The body knows how to heal itself. Kichari is so easy to digest and assimilate that it gives your body a break from the heavy lifting of digesting so it can divert more energy into its own self-renewing processes *without depriving it of food and nutrients*. It’s truly a nourishing cleanse. It’s all about the self-love, supporting the body, and acknowledging its innate capacity to heal rather than approaching it like a battlefield!

If these medicinal virtues really speak to you and you're planning a kitchari fast be aware that it really wakes-up the digestive system and you'll have a strong appetite, so plan on eating one pot/day of the recipe below. You can also enjoy kitchari as a medicinal and versatile meal, switching-up the vegetable portion (if you decide to add them- they're optional) to match the seasonal abundance at hand. This is true food as medicine and I encourage you to be curious, playful, and flexible in the process. The recipe below is my favorite, but try changing the ratios of the spices to suit your taste, or play around with different vegetable mixes. The only vegetables I avoid in kitchari are brassicas like kale, collards, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, etc because they can be a bit harder to digest and this is all about giving your digestive a break. And I also avoid adding alliums like garlic, onions, scallions, and leeks because they are considered *tamasic* in Ayurveda, meaning they can actually be a little aggravating to the nervous system and kichari is meant to be *sattvic*, meaning it promotes feelings of loving kindness. I recommend keeping the rice/bean/water ratios the same. The only spice in this recipe that you absolutely have to have is the asafoetida and you wouldn't want to add any more than the amount in this recipe below, since it's very easy to over-do it. I sometimes top mine with veggies sauteed in ghee and spices, like the picture below which is kitchari topped with shiitake mushrooms cooked with ghee, fresh turmeric and parsley. I also love topping it with fresh cilantro!

Kitchari



Ingredients:

- 1 cup white basmati rice
- ½ cup mung beans
- 9 cups water
- 1 tbsp ghee (clarified butter)
- 1 tsp coriander
- 1 tsp cumin seed
- 1 tsp fennel seed
- 1 tsp brown mustard seed
- ½ tsp cardamom pod (or seeds)
- 2 tsp turmeric pwd
- 1 pinch asafoetida (also known as hing)
- 1 handful fresh cilantro lvs (optional)
- 1 ½ cups assorted vegetables (optional)
- dash of sea salt (to taste)

Combine the rice, mung beans and water and cook at a low simmer, covered, for about 20 minutes until the beans become soft. Be sure to check it and stir from time to time because sometimes it sticks to the bottom the pan. If this is happening simply add more water. While that is cooking, chop any veggies you are adding (zucchini, sweet potato, carrot, squash, asparagus and non-brassica greens are all nice), if you are adding them, its optional. Add the vegetables to the rice/mung mixture and cook 10 minutes longer. In a separate pan brown the spices with ghee for a minute or two, being careful

not to burn them. Lastly, add the browned spices and ghee to the rice/mung/veggie mix and thoroughly mix together. Top with chopped cilantro and a dash of sea salt, and serve!

Notes & Concurrent Therapies:

Ghee is an important ingredient in kitchari. If it feels intimidating to make you own, I suggest buying some- it's readily available at many grocery stores and co-ops. It serves as a digestive aid and increases digestive or metabolic fire (*agni*), improving nutrient absorption and assimilation. It is known to lubricate the joints and connective tissue of the body, increasing flexibility. It also serves as a vehicle to bring the medicine of the spices deeper into the body. Lastly, it nourishes the nervous system, enhancing memory and cognition.

It's suggested to take Triphala powder, a mix of the three berries Amalaki, Bibhitaki, and Haritaki, along with a kitchari fast to further support elimination. Take 1/4 tsp in a very small amount of water in the morning just upon waking and just before bed for about 3 days, then increasing dose to 1/2 tsp after that. The idea is to take it in the morning and evening on an empty stomach. If the taste is too strong for you can take 2 capsules/dose in place of the powder, although they don't work quite as well. You could also use digestive bitters instead of the Triphala. This part is important because during a kitchari cleanse it's actually very easy to become constipated, since the body is doing so much important work waking-up those organs of elimination and sometimes things get backed-up! Other ways to keep the bowels moving is ample water (VERY important!), prune juice, and/or psyllium husks with water.

It's also lovely to drink the traditional Ayurvedic tea blend, sometimes called "Wise Water" of equal parts cumin seed, coriander seed, and fennel seed. Add 1 tsp of the seeds per 1 cup water, nibbling on the seeds that float at the top of your tea! Drink freely throughout your kitchari fast.