

From Ancient Grains to Modern Meals: Millet-Enriched Traditional Foods

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Millets play a vital role in Indian cuisine, offering both nutritional and culinary benefits. Rich in fiber, protein, and essential minerals like calcium and iron, millets contribute to a balanced diet and help combat various nutritional deficiencies. They have a low glycemic index, making them an excellent choice for managing blood sugar levels, which is particularly beneficial for individuals with diabetes.

In Indian recipes, millets are versatile and used in various traditional and contemporary dishes. They can be prepared as porridge, upma, or khichdi, and are often used in baking and snack foods. For instance, ragi (finger millet) is commonly used to make ragi roti and ragi dosa, while bajra (pearl millet) is featured in bajra khichdi and bajra roti. Jowar (sorghum) is popular in jowar bhakri and jowar upma. These grains are not only nutritious but also enhance the flavor and texture of dishes, making them a valuable addition to both traditional and modern Indian cuisine.

Millets are a powerhouse of nutrition, offering a rich array of essential nutrients that contribute significantly to overall health. These small grains are packed with dietary fiber, which aids in digestion and helps maintain healthy cholesterol levels. They are also a great source of plant-based protein, crucial for muscle repair and growth. Millets are abundant in minerals like calcium, magnesium, and iron, supporting bone health, cardiovascular function, and the prevention of anemia. Additionally, their low glycemic index makes them an excellent choice for managing blood sugar levels, which is beneficial for individuals with diabetes. The high antioxidant content in millets helps combat oxidative stress and inflammation, contributing to overall well-being and reducing the risk of chronic diseases. Incorporating millets into the diet not only enhances nutritional intake but also supports sustainable agricultural practices, making them a valuable component of a healthy lifestyle. Here are the few recipes.

Millet Porridge

Millet porridge is a wholesome breakfast option. To prepare it, mix 1 cup of millet flour with cold water without lumps. In a pot, bring 2 cups of water or milk to a boil. Add the millet flour mixed with cold water, reduce the heat, and simmer for 15-20 minutes by stirring continuously until the mixture is

semi solid and translucent. Sweeten with honey or maple syrup, and add fruits, nuts, or seeds as desired or simply add jiggery and serve. Millet porridge is rich in nutrients and can be given to children during fevers.

Bajra Roti

Bajra roti is a popular Indian flatbread made from pearl millet flour. Combine 1 cup of bajra flour with a pinch of salt. Gradually add warm water to form a smooth dough. Divide the dough into balls and roll them out into flat circles. Cook each roti on a hot griddle, flipping occasionally, until brown spots appear and the roti is cooked through. Serve with yogurt or vegetable curry.

Foxtail Millet Upma

Foxtail millet upma is a savory breakfast dish. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a pan, and add mustard seeds, cumin seeds, and a few curry leaves. Once they splutter, add chopped onions, green chilies, and ginger. Sauté until the onions are translucent. Add 1 cup of foxtail millet and roast for a few minutes. Pour in 2 cups of water and cook until the millet is tender. Garnish with coriander leaves and serve hot.

Kodo Millet Salad

Kodo millet salad is a refreshing and nutritious side dish. Cook 1 cup of kodo millet in 2 cups of water until tender, then let it cool. In a bowl, mix the cooked millet with chopped cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, and bell peppers. Add a dressing made from lemon juice, olive oil, salt, and pepper. Toss well and garnish with fresh herbs like mint or parsley.

Little Millet Khichdi

Little millet khichdi is a comforting one-pot meal. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a pot, and add cumin seeds, mustard seeds, and a pinch of asafoetida. Add chopped onions, garlic, and ginger, and sauté until golden. Stir in 1 cup of little millet and 1/2 cup of split yellow lentils (moong dal). Add 3 cups of water and your choice of vegetables. Cook until everything is tender and the flavors are well blended. Season with salt and serve hot.

Improving the nutritional value of millets through processing involves several techniques. Here are some effective methods:

1. **Soaking:** Soaking millets before cooking can enhance their digestibility and increase the

availability of nutrients like iron, zinc, and magnesium. It also helps reduce phytic acid, which can inhibit nutrient absorption.

2. **Sprouting:** Sprouting millets increases their nutritional value by enhancing vitamin content, especially B-vitamins, and increasing the bioavailability of minerals. It also improves protein quality and digestibility.
3. **Fermentation:** Fermenting millets can increase the levels of certain vitamins, such as B-vitamins, and make minerals more bioavailable. It also improves the digestibility of proteins and carbohydrates.
4. **Roasting:** Roasting millets can enhance their flavor and reduce anti-nutritional factors like phytic acid. It also increases the availability of some nutrients, though it might reduce certain heat-sensitive vitamins.
5. **Milling:** Milling can remove the bran and germ, which might reduce fiber and some vitamins. However, whole grain milling

(keeping the bran and germ) can preserve more nutrients. For optimal nutritional value, whole grain milling is preferred.

6. **Popping:** Popping millets can increase their crunchiness and taste. It also reduces anti-nutritional factors and can make certain nutrients more digestible.
7. **Blending:** Combining millets with other grains or legumes can enhance their overall nutritional profile, improving the amino acid balance and increasing the intake of essential nutrients.
8. **Cooking:** Cooking millets properly ensures that they are digestible and helps to maximize nutrient availability. Using minimal water and avoiding overcooking can help preserve nutrients.

By applying these processing techniques, you can enhance the nutritional profile of millets, making them a more valuable addition to a balanced diet.

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