



Sikhye

Sweet Rice Punch | 식혜



<https://koreancuisine.net>

A classic Korean dessert beverage made by fermenting cooked white rice in malted barley water, then simmering it with sugar. It is characterized by its uniquely refreshing, natural sweetness and the delightful chewy texture of the floating rice grains. Best served icy cold, it acts as a wonderful natural digestif and is an absolute staple during Korean holidays and at traditional bathhouses (*jjimjilbang*).

 **Total: 7 hrs (incl. fermentation) | Prep: 30 mins | Cook: 30 mins**
(Ferment 5-6 hrs) |  **Moderate |**  **Sweet & Refreshing |**  **Traditional Digestive Drink**

Ingredients (Yields approx. 2.5 liters)

- **Main Ingredients:** 200g malted barley powder (*yeotgireum*), 2.5 liters water, 2 cups warm cooked short-grain white rice (approx. 400g)
- **Sweetener & Garnish:** 1 cup sugar (adjust to taste), 1 tbsp pine nuts

Substitutes & Notes

- **Sugar** → Agave nectar, stevia, or monk fruit sweetener (for a lower-calorie option).

Allergy Information

- **Contains:** Wheat (Malted barley) (*Fully Vegan & Vegetarian-friendly*)

Equipment

- Large Mixing Bowl, Fine-mesh Strainer or Cheesecloth, Electric Rice Cooker, Large Pot, Ladle

Cooking Instructions

1. **Extracting the Barley Water:** Place the malted barley powder in a large bowl and pour in half of the water (1.25 liters). Let it soak for 30 minutes. Vigorously rub and massage the powder with your hands to extract a milky liquid. Strain the liquid into another container using a fine-mesh strainer or cheesecloth. Repeat this process with the remaining water, combining all the extracted liquid.
2. **Settling the Sediment:** Let the extracted barley water sit undisturbed for 1–2 hours. The heavy, starchy white sediment will settle to the bottom. (You must only use the clear liquid on top for the next step to ensure a beautifully clean, clear beverage).
3. **Fermenting the Rice:** Spread the warm cooked rice in the pot of an electric

rice cooker. Carefully pour in *only* the clear barley liquid, discarding the white sediment at the bottom. Close the lid and set the rice cooker to the "Keep Warm" (보온) setting (approx. 50–60°C). Let it ferment for 5–6 hours. The fermentation is successful when 10 to 15 grains of rice float to the surface.

4. **Boiling:** Transfer the fermented liquid and rice from the rice cooker to a large pot on the stove. Add the sugar and bring to a rolling boil over high heat. Skim off any foam that rises to the top for a cleaner taste. Simmer for about 10 minutes.
5. **Chilling & Serving:** Let the *sikhye* cool completely at room temperature, then transfer it to an airtight pitcher and store it in the refrigerator. Serve icy cold—preferably almost slushy—with a few pine nuts floating on top.

Cooking & Pairing Tips / Health Benefits

- **Sikhye vs. Gamju:** Did you know the name of this drink changes depending on how you serve it? If you serve it with the rice grains floating in the cup, it is called *Sikhye*. If you prefer to strain out all the rice and drink only the sweet, clear broth, it is known as *Gamju*. Try it both ways!
- **Floating the Rice Beautifully:** If you want to ensure the rice grains float perfectly on top instead of sinking to the bottom, try scooping out a handful of the fermented rice grains *before* boiling. Rinse them under cold water, keep them in the fridge, and simply add a spoonful to each cup right before serving.
- **A Natural Digestif:** Malted barley contains amylase, a natural enzyme that breaks down the starches in the rice into sweet maltose during fermentation. This makes the drink an excellent digestive aid, highly recommended after a heavy or greasy meal.

Nutrition Facts (Estimated)

Total Content : Approx. 250ml (1 serving)
Calories : 110 kcal
– Sodium : 5mg
– Total Carbohydrate : 26.0g
– Sugar : 16.0g
– Total Fat : 0.2g
– Saturated Fat : 0.0g
– Cholesterol : 0.0mg
– Protein : 1.0g
– Calcium : 10.0mg

*Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet and standard Korean nutritional reference values

**Nutritional values are calculated based on the original ingredients, not substitutes

The Symphony of Sprouted Barley and Sun-Ripened Grain: The Translucent Poetry of Fermented Sweetness

Sikhye (Sweet Rice Punch) stands as the radiant pinnacle of Korean traditional fermented beverage gastronomy (*Eumcheongnyu*), where the honest bounty of steamed rice and the earth-born vigor of sprouted barley malt converge in gentle warmth to dissolve structural boundaries. As dense, opaque rice grains slowly digest within the translucent malt extract across five to six hours, the intricate starch matrices gracefully transform into pure, crystalline, and natural sweetness.

The silent culmination of this enzymatic journey—where once-heavy grains lighten like feathers to serenely float atop the translucent surface—is a breathtaking biochemical lyricism. Boiling the brew to halt enzymatic progression and thoroughly chilling it creates a bowl of Sikhye that purifies the palate with an unadulterated, crisp clarity that artificial beverages cannot rival. Whether savored with floating rice grains as *Sikhye* or cleanly strained as *Gamju*, both expressions offer profound variations born from the same harmonious root.

True gastronomy does not rely on aggressive, fleeting stimulation; it flourishes in the ancestral wisdom of using natural enzymes to comfort the weary body with gentle, lingering sweetness. Partaking in a frosty bowl of Sikhye adorned with delicate ice flakes at the end of a rich holiday feast is a sophisticated, centuries-old ritual—effortlessly cleansing the digestive system and replenishing the spirit with pristine, wholesome vitality.

Editor's Review

1. A Delicate Cadence of Pure Maltose Nectar and the Airy Dissolution of Fermented Rice Grains

The moment the ice-chilled brew touches the palate, the pristine, elegant sweetness of natural maltose washes across the tongue without a trace of heaviness. As the delicate rice grains floating on the surface yield effortlessly beneath the teeth, they release a subtle, roasted grain nuttiness that beautifully contrasts with the lean nectar—orchestrating an endlessly refreshing and multi-dimensional sensory pleasure.

2. Enzymatic Amylase Saccharification Dynamics and Hydrodynamic Buoyancy Mechanics

Sikhye represents an exacting application of enzymatic food chemistry. Operating within the optimal 50–60°C window, alpha- and beta-amylases in the sprouted barley systematically hydrolyze complex insoluble rice starches (amylose and amylopectin) into soluble maltose and low-molecular dextrans. As the dense crystalline core of each grain is digested into a porous lattice, its specific gravity drops below that of the liquid, causing the grains to rise naturally to the surface. A definitive boiling phase thermally denatures the enzymes to secure sweetness

stability, establishing an absolute thermodynamic equilibrium.

3. Digestive Harmony at the Feast's Finale and the Timeless Haven of Generous Hospitality

Served ice-cold to conclude a lavish banquet or holiday gathering, a bowl of Sikhye represents the ancestral Korean philosophy of functional hospitality, effortlessly cutting through rich oils and soothing digestion. Savoring this time-honored elixir—tenderly prepared for generations to honor guests—washes away daily fatigue, granting a timeless sanctuary of heartfelt comfort, restorative peace, and grounded serenity.

