

2015 02.03 Health Matters
Arsenic in Rice

This is Health Matters, with a report on arsenic in rice.

You don't need a PhD to know that the food supply in this country contains many foods and food products that pose health risks. And unfortunately, eating all organic does not protect you from all risk. Organically grown food can still absorb poisonous chemicals like arsenic that occur naturally in the soil. Rice is a case in point. Consumer Reports found that rice contains arsenic, and that hundreds of popular rice products; such as organic infant rice cereal and a variety of rice breakfast cereals -- contain arsenic in levels that exceed the FDA recommended minimum. To date, hot rice cereals contain the highest amounts of arsenic.

The report of unsafe levels of arsenic in organic infant rice cereal is a serious wake-up call because arsenic can have harmful impacts on a baby's developing brain. It is also a potent carcinogen. Exposure to arsenic during childhood is associated with neuro-behavioral problems in youth and with cancer and lung disease later in life. The irony is that many of these arsenic-containing rice products are marketed as health foods for children. They are seen as an excellent food for children who are gluten intolerant, and as good substitutes for milk as well.

A recent Consumer Reports study expanded their earlier research, which sounded the first warning about arsenic in rice in 2012. This time around they looked at data released by the FDA, the Federal Food and Drug Authority, on 656 processed foods containing rice. They found that rice cereal and rice pasta contain even more amounts of arsenic than earlier studies detected.

In some instances, just one serving of rice pasta or rice cereal could put kids over the weekly maximum amount of rice recommended for children. Same with rice cakes. One serving of rice cakes supplies close to the recommended weekly limit. These limits are meant to insure that arsenic does not accumulate to harmful levels in developing bodies. The FDA more or less agrees with Consumer Reports advisories on the amount of rice products it's safe to feed your kids. It stresses that parents should consider other options than rice cereal for a child's first solid food.

Rice drinks pose a risk as well. In fact, Consumer Reports recommends that children younger than 5 should not drink rice drinks at all. They are not a healthy alternative to milk.

The risks associated with arsenic in rice are not limited to children. Research has found that adult blood arsenic levels increase with greater rice consumption. In other words, the more rice you eat, the more likely it is that your arsenic blood levels rise at the same time. Several products tested higher than the 5 parts-per-billion limit EPA has designated as safe for adults.

Perhaps the most surprising find in recent rice research is that brown rice contains more arsenic than white rice. Brown rice has long been promoted as more nutritious than white. But some brands of brown rice tested out as having 50% more arsenic per serving than the safe limit calls for. A few even had double the safe limit. These double-the-limit products were highly processed rice products.

Examples include brown rice syrup, brown rice pasta, rice cakes and brown rice crisps. The superiority of whole grains doesn't apply to rice. Brown rice contains more arsenic because it accumulates in the outer shell of the grain. White rice is processed to remove the outer shell. The presence of arsenic in rice does not mean adults need to avoid rice altogether. It does mean, however, that rice is not a wise food for infants and should only be given in very limited amounts to children.

Adults who want to continue eating rice occasionally should make a point of buying rice grown in California. California rice has less arsenic because there is less arsenic in the soil here. Lundberg's California White Basmati Rice, for example has 1.3 to 1.6 parts per billion arsenic in 1/4 cup, uncooked. This is well below the safe limit established by the FDA. Furthermore, when rice is rinsed before cooking and boiled in a high water-to-rice ratio, the arsenic content is reduced.

Sources and Links

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine/2015/01/>

[how-much-arsenic-is-in-your-rice/index.htm](http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine/2015/01/how-much-arsenic-is-in-your-rice/index.htm)

<http://chriskresser.com/arsenic-in-rice-how-concerned-should-you-be>

http://www.babycenter.com/404_is-it-safe-to-feed-my-baby-ricecereal_10384011.bc