

Cooking tips to possibly lessen risk of arsenic in rice

October 8 2012, by Monica Eng

Last month rice lovers got some bitter news. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Consumer Reports released studies showing "worrisome" levels of cancer-causing arsenic in many popular rices and rice products.

Within days some doctors called for limiting [rice](#) consumption, especially in children. Consumer Reports suggested capping weekly servings to less than a cup of cooked rice for kids and about 1½ cups of cooked rice for adults. And the Illinois Attorney General's office, which conducted its own tests on infant rice cereal, suggested watching how much rice cereal parents feed to babies.

The FDA, however, stopped short of advising a cap on rice consumption or even a limit on [arsenic](#) residues in rice. But it did say that the levels found have prompted the agency to prioritize further testing of about 1,000 more samples by the end of the year in order to come up with "science based" recommendations.

Critics of the Consumer Reports recommendations are quick to point out that no large-scale [epidemiological study](#) has yet isolated rice in arsenic as a source of cancer in humans. But no such study has ruled it out either. And all acknowledge that [inorganic arsenic](#) is classified as a Class A [carcinogen](#), making high [consumption levels](#) a bad idea.

For those who don't eat much rice, this issue may be small potatoes. But Asian and Latino foods lovers and the nation's growing legions of gluten-

free eaters depend on rice for a large part of their diet. So what are those groups supposed to do, especially those who feed kids, until the FDA comes out with official rice recommendations?

We talked to experts for some advice.

-Rinse your rice thoroughly. The FDA cites several studies indicating that "thoroughly rinsing rice until the water is clear (four to six changes of water) reduced the total arsenic content by up to approximately 25-30 percent."

-Check your municipal water report. "Make sure your local water supply does not have high levels of arsenic," says John Duxbury of Cornell University, who studies arsenic and rice. "If you do have high levels, washing can make it worse. But if you are under 10 parts per billion, it should help."

-Cook and drain your rice sort of like pasta. "We say to use about 6 parts water to 1 part rice," says Michael Hansen, a senior staff scientist at Consumer Reports. "And then drain off the water after it's done." The FDA says that studies show rinsing and cooking in excess water can reduce total arsenic levels by 50 to 60 percent. "However, it should be noted that for enriched rice, rinsing will also likely reduce the amount of added nutrients," the agency said.

-Choose aromatic rices. For those who are already fans of Indian basmati or Thai jasmine rices, the news is not so bad. According to the hundreds of recently released test results, aromatic rice varieties show the lowest levels of inorganic arsenic. Imported basmati and jasmine rices showed about half to one-eighth the level of arsenic as regular rices grown in the Southern U.S.

-Consider limiting brown rice consumption. From a nutritional and fiber

standpoint, brown rice is tops, but because its bran remains intact it can also hold on to higher levels of arsenic, according to test results. Are the nutritional benefits worth the arsenic load? Hard to say at this point. But some test results indicate that brown rice from California and India have much lower levels of arsenic than [brown rice](#) from Southern U.S. states. For now, they may be the best choice.

-Choose California. Of the domestic rices tested by Consumer Reports, California rices had lower levels of arsenic than those in other states. FDA rice results also indicated that some U.S. rice had lower levels of arsenic, but the data it released to the public did not specify states of origin.

Be careful when feeding babies rice cereal and rice milk. Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office conducted tests of rice cereals for babies that she announced all contained inorganic arsenic. Gerber recently released a statement announcing it now sources its baby cereal rice only from California. Still [Consumer Reports](#) advises that children do not drink rice milk and that infant rice cereal be served no more than once a day.

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