

Arsenic and Old News

By ACSH Staff — September 9, 2013



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In today's Let's Worry About Nothing news, there is a story that will either make people feel better, worse, or simply confused about a non-problem tiny amounts of arsenic in rice.

For the first time ever, the FDA published data on arsenic levels in rice and rice products, and the results should enable people to cross one needless worry off their list (except for Dr. Oz followers, who have far more to worry about than this).

The FDA [report](#) [2], released last Friday, examined 1,300 food samples, ranging from cereals, bakery mixes, beverages, and, of course, different types of rice. The conclusion: Arsenic is found in minute quantities just about everywhere (which makes sense, since it ranks [50th](#) [3] in abundance of the roughly 100 elements found in the earth's crust).

While there is no question that arsenic is a poison and carcinogen in higher concentrations, FDA commissioner Margaret Hamburg said, "All of the data suggest levels that are not high enough to give us cause for concern for immediate or near-term effects."

What can one do about this? Not much, says ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom. Arsenic is found in soil and groundwater, and there is no way to get rid of it. Since rice is one of the few crops that take up arsenic, it will necessarily contain more of the element than other crops. But, given the enormous amount of rice consumed worldwide, especially in Asia, where is the evidence of massive health effects?

To further complicate matter, arsenic exists in two forms: organic and inorganic. In the former, the arsenic is part of a carbon-containing compound, which renders it almost harmless. It is the inorganic form that is toxic. So, the total amount of arsenic in any given food or drink is a meaningless number.

Furthermore, he adds, it is ironic, if not downright hilarious that brown rice, which is touted as a healthy alternative to processed white rice, actually contains more arsenic than its processed cousin. This amuses me greatly, since the most militant organic restaurants will look at you like you have three heads if you dare order white rice in their establishment. It's almost blasphemy.

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2013/09/09/arsenic-and-old-news>

Links

[1] <http://acsh.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Screen-Shot-2013-09-09-at-4.15.21-PM.png>

[2] <http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodbornIllnessContaminants/Metals/ucm319870.htm>

[3] <http://www.periodictable.com/Properties/A/CrustAbundance.v.log.html>