

What's in my family's rice?

3 tips to protect your family from arsenic and cadmium in rice



Rice is a staple in many family meals – but it's also a top source of arsenic in the diet and contains toxic heavy metals like cadmium as well. These contaminants are linked to cancer and developmental harm. **The good news? A few simple changes can help lower your family's exposure.** Here's how:

1 A no-cost solution: Cook rice like pasta to reduce arsenic.

Cook rice in 6 to 10 cups of water per 1 cup of rice, then drain excess water before eating. For rice cookers: Cook the rice in extra water, drain it, then finish cooking with just enough fresh water. (Experiment to find the right amount of water.)

Up to
60% less
arsenic than rice
cooked in just
enough water

Tip: For extra arsenic reduction, soak rice for a half hour – or even overnight – before cooking it like pasta. Rinsing isn't effective.



2 Add variety to your diet with rice alternatives.

Other grains contain lower combined levels of 4 common heavy metal contaminants – arsenic, cadmium, lead, and mercury.

Try: quinoa, oatmeal, farro, barley, buckwheat, bulgur, couscous, millet, polenta.

69% less
heavy metals than
rice cooked in just
enough water

3 Choose rice with lower contaminant levels.

These 3 varieties have lower combined amounts of arsenic and cadmium:

- California rice – Calrose, Sushi, Jasmine, White
- Jasmine rice (Thailand)
- Basmati rice (India)

Avoid varieties with higher amounts, including:

- White rice grown in the Southeast U.S. or "USA"
- Brown rice
- Arborio rice (risotto) from Italy

These may be higher in other contaminants:

- Precooked rice – Instant (5-minute), Parboiled (10-minute), and Ready-to-Heat

32% less
heavy metals than
other rice types
on average

Balance the plate: Pair rice with iron-rich nutritious foods.

Cooking white rice in excess water (see the no-cost solution #1) washes away the added iron. **Many babies don't get enough iron, so talk to your pediatrician about nutrition and iron-rich foods.**

Variety is key to a healthy diet. Stand-out options include:

- **Iron-rich foods** – Lean red meat, poultry, beans, lentils, eggs, green vegetables, fresh and dried fruits.
- **Whole grains** – Aim to make at least half the grains you serve whole grains, like quinoa, barley, and farro (note: pearly grains and white rice are not whole).
- **Foods rich in calcium, zinc, B vitamins and vitamin C** to reduce the body's absorption of contaminants or speed up excretion. Options include lean meat, yogurt, cheese, leafy greens, broccoli, beans and lentils, citrus fruits, strawberries, and peppers.

Foods to skip: Rice-based processed foods are often high in arsenic that can't be boiled and drained away like arsenic in rice itself, including:

- Rice-based snacks
- Rice cakes
- Foods sweetened with brown rice syrup including some formula brands and cereal bars

