

Module 11 Lesson 6

Transcript

Today's lesson is on arsenic. Yes. We are talking arsenic in our food and I know that might sound a little scary, but we got to talk about it. If you didn't already know that it was there, well, we'll get to that part in a minute. But before we dive into this lesson, let's take a look at what we're going to discuss how arsenic ends up in our food supply, the physical effects of eating arsenic, how to limit exposure to arsenic, and how to explain this to your clients and why they and you should care. Have you had a client ask if he or she should avoid rice because of the arsenic scare? For me, that conjures up pictures of poison bottles like they have in cartoons I watched as a kid. Really? Yes, really. There's arsenic in our food. There's also lead and other dangerous elements in our food.

I'm not telling you this to scare you. I'm telling you this to inform you, so you can feel confident as an eater and a helper. Just to put your mind at ease, nobody is trying to poison us. Arsenic is naturally occurring in nature and may concentrate in certain areas where volcanoes have erupted, where fracking and mining take place, where there are power plants and unfortunately, some pesticides are coated in arsenic that gets into the foods we eat and the soil we use to grow our food. Kids are most at risk of arsenic poisoning because their bodies and brains are still forming. The bad effects we see from arsenic poisoning are not, however, from food. Still, the age of the exposed person, the amount of exposure, and the type of arsenic, inorganic being more dangerous than organic arsenic, are the three factors that can lead to poisoning.

However, you should know that arsenic poisoning is extremely rare in developed countries, so you're probably not going to come across it, more than likely at least. And just so you know the symptoms, arsenic poison can cause vomiting, abdominal pain and cephalopathy and watery diarrhea that contains blood. Arsenic exposure is monitored by the FDA. They oversee arsenic levels in foods, cosmetics and supplements. They recommend these few things to limit your exposure. Be aware that products and supplements are not under the supervision of the FDA and are a place where hidden toxins like arsenic can be found in concentrated amounts. Test wells regularly. We don't think about it much in the city, but lots and lots of people use well water near their homes. Well water, as in water that comes from a well, is a place where arsenic can concentrate. Keep bottled water on hand and use it for drinking and cooking if arsenic levels are high.

Rice and apple juice are two foods of concern. People seem most concerned about rice, but more arsenic is found in juice and vegetables than rice and none of them in large amounts to be concerned about. The FDA still supports feeding babies rice cereal and stands behind their assessment that US infant rice cereal has the lowest levels of arsenic worldwide. They also report

that even if you eat a ton of rice, you shouldn't worry about the arsenic content. I tell my clients who are really concerned to purchase rice that was grown in California as it has been found to have the lowest concentrations of arsenic. Another tip to remove arsenic from rice, if you're worried about it, is to rinse it well in a large amount of water. Finally, boiling rather than steaming rice and discarding the cooking water helps to remove arsenic as well.

When it comes to juices, clients and parents should limit juice consumption and stick to water and herbal teas. We want to do that really anyway. Places like Consumer Reports have better juice alternative lists, which can also be helpful and useful in keeping arsenic and heavy metals out of our diets. We can make ourselves nuts about worrying about arsenic, but the best advice I can give you here is to meet your client where he or she is already and try to put their mind at ease through information and education.

Before we end this lesson, let's review the few takeaways. Arsenic is naturally occurring in nature and may concentrate in areas where volcanoes have erupted, where fracking and mining take place, where there are power plants, and where pesticides are used. Rice and apple juice are the two foods that commonly contain some levels of arsenic. And arsenic poisoning from food is not very common, but you can still help your clients to limit exposure by being mindful that supplements aren't regulated and may contain arsenic, making sure that well water is tested regularly, if you use well water, buying rice from California, which has the lowest concentration of arsenic and boiling rather than steaming rice. I will see you in the next lesson.