Is White Rice to Blame for Skyrocketing Type 2 Diabetes in China?

By Julia Helms
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Rice has been a staple food for 5,000 years, yet some new studies and news headlines suggest that each additional daily serving of it increases your risk of type 2 diabetes by 11 percent.

In the Nutritionfacts.org video below, Dr. Michael Greger reviews the research linking white rice consumption with the rise in type 2 diabetes, largely in Asian populations. The rate at which people in China and Japan are getting diabetes has skyrocketed in the past decade and is now very similar to the incidence in the United States. However, China has seven times less obesity and Japan has eight times less obesity than the United States. So what's going on?

China's Diabetes Rate Has More Than Tripled, But Their Obesity Rate Has Not

Looking at the data, Dr. Greger found that the rate of new type 2 diabetes diagnoses has sharply increased, while rice consumption has actually decreased by 30 percent. Pork, oil, and other meat consumption has sharply increased in the past 16 years.

If the rise in meat consumption is to blame, then why do recent studies in Japan and China associate white rice intake with diabetes? Dr. Greger theorizes that it's the addition of animal protein. When ingested, carbohydrates cause a spike in blood glucose, triggering the pancreas to secrete insulin. Studies show that when animal protein is added to refined carbs, that blood sugar spike is much higher.

	Men ≥20 years	Women ≥20 years
	Obese	Obese
USA	31·7 (30·0–33·4)	33·9 (31·8–35·7)
China	3·8 (3·5–4·3)	5·0 (4·5–5·5)
Japan	4·5 (4·0–5·0)	3·3 (3·0–3·7)

View Dr. Greger's Sources:

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