

Viewpoint: IARC has labeled cell phones, night shifts and coffee as likely carcinogens — but we're not doomed. Here's why we don't need to panic

Over the years IARC has labeled red meat, pickled foods and salted fish, carpentry, working at night, using cell phones, and, just recently, firefighting as possible, probable or definitely carcinogenic. How are we to respond to these pronouncements in an appropriate way? Stop using my cell phone? Quit my job? Give up meat? If so, you'd also have to give up bread and many fruits and vegetables, as they contain substances that are considered carcinogenic under IARC's system.

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It wouldn't be strange to start feeling anxious about all this and wondering if, we're all, in fact, doomed. But as another famous line from the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy tells us, "Don't Panic."

The IARC monograph program was set up in the early 1970s when our understanding of cancer and its causes was developing. At the time it was assumed that carcinogenicity was a fairly straight-forward, binary issue — either a substance caused cancer, or it did not — and that the number of cancer-causing agents was relatively limited.

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Not surprisingly, the IARC Monograph program consistently finds just about everything can cause cancer. Of the 1,000 or so substances and life-style hazards they have evaluated, they have only found one (1) that definitely did not cause cancer.

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Maybe [the] IARC Monograph program needs to get more specific with its questions and the context of those questions. Instead of the simplistic question, "Does a substance cause cancer?" they should ask questions like: "At what dose does it cause cancer? (in other words, how *potent* is it?) Is anyone, ever, likely to be exposed at that dose?"

[This is an excerpt. Read the original post here](#)