Objectives Several epidemiologic studies indicate an increased risk of lung cancer among cooks but it is not known whether this is caused by cigarette smoking or by occupational exposure to carcinogens. Emissions from high-temperature frying have been classified by the IARC as probably carcinogenic to humans.

Methods We used data from the SYNERGY project with pooled information on lifetime work histories and tobacco smoking from 13 176 lung cancer cases and 16 129 controls from 11 case-control studies in Europe and Canada. There were 704 persons (405 men, 299 women) who had ever worked as a cook or kitchen worker (based on ISCO-68), among them 340 cases and 364 controls. ORs and 95% CIs were estimated by unconditional logistic regression, adjusted for study, age, sex, smoking, and ever employment in an occupation with established lung cancer risk.

Results Occupation as a cook or kitchen worker was associated with an increased lung cancer risk before (OR 1.20, 95% CI 1.03 to 1.40) but not after (OR 1.01, 95% CI 0.86 to 1.20) controlling for smoking habits. There was no significant exposure-response relationship in terms of work duration, and no significant heterogeneity in lung cancer risk among cooks across studies. It was not possible to separate cooks from other kitchen workers.

Conclusions Working as a cook or kitchen worker was not associated with an increased risk of lung cancer. However, the possible risk by cooking fumes cannot be ruled out. Misclassification of exposure may have biased our results towards the null.

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LUNG CANCER RISK AMONG COOKS AND KITCHEN WORKERS IN A POOLED ANALYSIS OF CASE-CONTROL STUDIES IN EUROPE AND CANADA

Carolina Bigert,¹ Ann Olsson,² Per Gustavsson,¹ Thomas Brüning,³ Benjamin Kendzia,³ Beate Pesch,³ Karl-Heinz Jöckel,⁴ Hermann Pohlabein,⁵ Wolfgang Ahrens,⁵ Isabelle Gross,³ Irene Brüske,⁶ Heinz-Erich Wichmann,⁶ Franco Merletti,⁷ Dario Mirabelli,⁷ Lorenzo Richiardi,⁷ David Zaridze,⁸ Adrian Cassidy,⁹ Neonila Szeszenia-Dabrowska,¹⁰ Peter Rudnai,¹¹ Jolanta Lissowska,¹² Isabelle Stücker,¹³ Eleonora Fabianova,¹⁴ Rodica Stanescu Dumitru,¹⁵ Vladimir Bencko,¹⁶ Lenka Foretova,¹⁷ Vladimir Janout,¹⁸ Jack Siemiatycki,¹⁹ Maria Teresa Landi,²⁰ Neil Caporaso,²⁰ Paul Brennan,² Simone Benhamou,²¹ Veronique Benhaim-Luzon,² Hans Kromhout,²² Roel Vermeulen,²² Susan Peters,²² Dario Consonni,²³ Bas Bueno-de-Mesquita,²⁴ Paolo Boffetta,²⁵ Kurt Straif² ¹Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden; ²IARC, Lyon, France; ³IPA, Bochum, Germany; ⁴University of Duisburg-Essen, Essen, Germany; ⁵Bremen Institute for Prevention Research and Social Medicine, Bremen, Germany; ⁶Deutsches Forschungszentrum für Gesundheit und Umwelt, Neuherberg, Germany; ⁷University of Turin, Turin, Italy; ⁸Russian Cancer Research Centre, Moscow, Russia; ⁹Cancer Research Centre, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK; ¹⁰Nofer Institute, Lodz, Poland; ¹¹National Institute of Environment Health, Budapest, Hungary; ¹²Cancer Center and Institute of Oncology, Warsaw, Poland; ¹³INSERM U 754 – IFR69, Villejuif, France; ¹⁴Regional Authority of Public Health, Banska Bystrica, Slovakia; ¹⁵Institute of Public Health, Bucharest, Romania; ¹⁶Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic; ¹⁷Masaryk Memorial Cancer Institute, Brno, Czech Republic; ¹⁸Palacky University, Olomouc, Czech Republic; ¹⁹University of Montreal, Montreal, Canada; ²⁰NCI, Bethesda, USA; ²¹INSERM U 946, Paris, France; ²²Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands; ²³Fondazione IRCCS Ca'Granda – Ospedale Maggiore Policlinico, Milan, Italy; ²⁴NIVM, Bilthoven, The Netherlands; ²⁵Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, USA

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