

Meat, Coffee Why Only Activists Pay Attention To IARC Claims



By Hank Campbell — November 2, 2015



[1]If you were laughing at the notion that [sausage is just as](#)

[carcinogenic as cigarettes](#) [2], you are not alone the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) is scrambling to repair the damage to what's left of the credibility of its International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) after its latest paper about processed meat. But that report [is actually no worse than any of their others](#) [3]. While activists had jumped on claims about glyphosate and diesel emissions and 400 other things declared to be carcinogens, they would be wise to give this latest monograph a wide berth.

Scientifically, these reports are all suspect, because they are meta-analyses, which are of limited value at best. Additionally, the studies they use are hand-picked by participants who meet a very narrow set of criteria. If you have ever consulted, for example, the committee decrees you have a conflict of interest, but if you are the co-author of one of the papers under review, that is fine.

This has been a problem for decades. [As American Council on Science and Health Scientific Advisor Dr. Geoffrey Kabat, cancer epidemiologist at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, notes in Slate](#) [4], in 1991 they tackled coffee.

To recap, IARC uses four classifications:

- Group 1: Carcinogenic to humans
- Group 2A: Probably carcinogenic to humans
- Group 2B: Possibly carcinogenic to humans
- Group 3: Not classifiable as to carcinogenicity
- Group 4: Probably not carcinogenic

Since **only one out of almost 1,000 compounds** they have ever looked has been deemed **not carcinogenic** (Group 4), it is given that if someone on a UN committee decides to look at your chemical, your company is going to be the subject of an environmental fundraising campaign, or at least a rant by The Food Babe.

In 1991 coffee was declared a 2B carcinogen because they found a weak relationship between

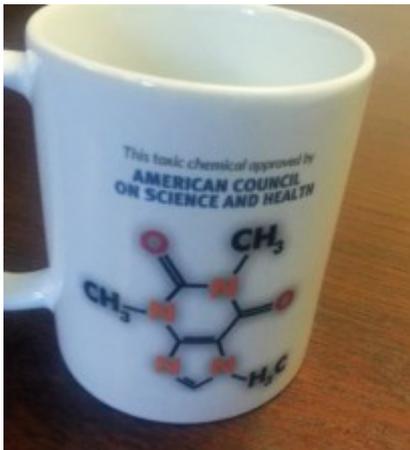
coffee and bladder cancer. As a result, every Starbucks in California contains a Prop. 65 warning label about coffee. Though people drink coffee every day, more than ever, and therefore the population available for study is huge, the evidence shows that bladder cancer is not increasing and never has. As Dr. Kabat notes, the weakness in IARC meta-analyses is not just bias among the participants on the panels and the papers they want to include, it is bias in the case-control studies the papers contain; people with serious illness will necessarily have more recall bias. Who doesn't want to blame something for their cancer?

In the last few decades, Kabat notes, other cohort studies with large groups have been done, and coffee consumption is instead correlated with a number of *reduced* cancers, including bladder cancer the thing that got coffee a warning label. That is obviously nonsense.

When a committee gives a lot of weight to positive results and ignores negative results, almost anything will become a "carcinogen."

We here at the American Council on Science and Health have said this for decades. Our now-famous Thanksgiving Menu itemizes everything in a holiday meal and then lists the chemicals in every food item, conventional, organic, shade-grown, kosher, and every single one is linked to cancer. Yet you aren't getting more cancer at Thanksgiving.

So it's okay to eat some sausage at breakfast and drink a coffee also. It is not giving you cancer any more than the pesticide Roundup or your cell phone is.



[5]

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2015/11/02/meat-coffee-why-only-activists-pay-attention-to-iarc-claims>

Links

[1] <http://acsh.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/coffee-cancer.jpg>

[2] <http://acsh.org/2015/10/u-n-panel-says-sausage-is-as-dangerous-as-smoking/>

[3] <http://acsh.org/?s=IARC&cat=0&x=16&y=30>

[4]

http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/medical_examiner/2015/10/coffee_does_not_cause_cancer_the_wh

[5] <http://acsh.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/coffee-cup-ACSH.jpg>