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Job Strain Isn't Associated with Elevated Risk for Cancer

No association was found for colorectal, lung, breast, or prostate cancer.

Psychological stress prompts physiological responses (e.g., release of stress hormones), which might trigger cancer-promoting effects. However, whether stress is associated with cancer is unclear. In this meta-analysis of 12 prospective European studies, researchers examined whether work-related stress is associated with cancer risk.

The analysis included 116,000 working adults (age range, 17–70) who were cancer-free at baseline. Self-reported job strain (defined as high demands and low control at work) was measured at baseline using a validated questionnaire. During a mean follow-up of 12 years, nearly 5% of participants developed cancer. In analyses adjusted for multiple confounders (including socioeconomic status, smoking, and alcohol use), job strain was not associated with overall cancer risk or with risk for colorectal, lung, breast, or prostate cancer. No combination of work demand (high vs. low) and control (high vs. low) was associated with overall cancer risk.

Comment: In this study, job strain was not associated with elevated risk for cancer. However, job strain is not entirely benign — the same investigators reported an association between job strain and risk for myocardial infarction and coronary death (*Lancet* 2012; 380:1491 (Link to: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(12\)60994-5](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(12)60994-5))).

— **Paul S. Mueller, MD, MPH, FACP** (Link to: http://general-medicine.jwatch.org/misc/board_about.dtl#aMueller)

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Citation(s):

Heikkilä K et al. Work stress and risk of cancer: Meta-analysis of 5700 incident cancer events in 116 000 European men and women. *BMJ* 2013 Feb 7; 346:f165. (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.f165> (Link to: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.f165>))

[Original article](#) (Link to: [/cgi/ijlink?linkType=FULL&journalCode=bmj&resid=346/feb07_1/f165](http://www.jwatch.org/cgi/ijlink?linkType=FULL&journalCode=bmj&resid=346/feb07_1/f165)) (Subscription may be required)

[Medline abstract](#) (Link to: [/cgi/external_ref?access_num=23393080&link_type=MED](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/external_ref?access_num=23393080&link_type=MED)) (Free)

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