

# Which Professions Are Associated With Cancer Risk?

Though the rate of workplace-related cancers has decreased due to safety regulations, there are obvious and hidden health risks for workers.

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About 5% to 8% of all cancers worldwide are caused by exposures to carcinogens in the workplace, according to the [National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health](#). Although the rate of workplace-related cancers has decreased due to safety regulations, exposure to some dusts, gases, and chemicals can increase cancer risk in those who are frequently exposed. What's more, there are hidden health risks for the average worker in seemingly safer industries or environments that could increase the risk of getting cancer.

Professions at a higher risk of exposure and cancer risk include:

## Office jobs

Sitting for most of the day — whether at a desk, in front of a screen, or behind the wheel — can increase one's cancer risk. [Studies](#) have found that those who sat for more than 8 hours a day with no physical activity had a risk of dying similar to the risk posed by obesity and smoking. Overtime, sitting regularly for long periods of time can cause other adverse effects, such as:

- Increased blood pressure
- High blood sugar (hyperglycemia)
- High cholesterol levels
- Excess body fat around the waist

## Shift work

Chronic disruptions to natural [circadian rhythms](#) have been linked to an increase in a variety of disorders, including cancer. When you work a night shift — such as taxi or rideshare drivers, merchandise stocker, or police officers — your body's natural circadian rhythm is disrupted. This can not only cause changes in sleeping patterns, but in other activities such as body temperature and digestion. Studies have shown that cancer development is closely related to a loss of circadian

balance in how we burn energy, respond to infection and disease, and age.

Truck drivers are especially at risk because in addition to the overnight work, the job entails sitting a lot of the time, regardless of the time of day.

### Agriculture and forestry careers

Sun exposure can cause burns from UV rays, increasing the risk of skin cancer or melanoma. This is especially true in areas or climates where there is increased sun exposure, and in those with fair skin or a family history of skin cancer. Exposure to some agricultural chemicals — such as pesticides and fertilizers, or engine exhaust — can also increase the risk of cancers like lymphoma and leukemia.

### Rubber manufacturing jobs

Working in factories that produce tires, rubber gloves, rubber bands, and other rubber products increases exposure to carcinogenic chemicals. Chemicals and toxins from rubber manufacturing are more often absorbed through the skin from repetitive skin contact, not just through inhalation. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) conducted a study determining that there are [specific chemicals](#) related to a heightened risk of bladder, leukemia, lung, and stomach cancer in the rubber industry.

### Construction and mining work

The biggest carcinogenic risk for construction workers is exposure to asbestos. An estimated 1.3 million construction and general industry workers are potentially exposed to asbestos each year. Cancers associated with asbestos exposure include larynx, lung, ovary, and mesothelioma.

Miners are also at risk of exposure to asbestos, but underground workers are also more likely to encounter uranium and radon, which can lead to a higher risk of cancer. Working in mines can put you at risk for a variety of cancers, including brain, mesothelioma, stomach, and thyroid cancers.

### Reducing career-related cancer risk

Across these professions, there are some preventative measures you can take to lower your cancer risk.

If working in construction, agriculture, or a job that requires you to be outside for most of the day, use sunscreen and limit exposure as much as possible by finding shade when possible. Sunglasses are also important to protect your eyes from harmful UV rays.

Fields such as construction and rubber manufacturing have laws that protect workers from and limit chemical and asbestos exposure. These regulations protect workers, requiring they wear protective equipment (such as face masks) and setting legal asbestos exposure limits. Quitting or never smoking cigarettes can help decrease the risk of asbestos-related lung cancer.

If you find yourself sitting most of the day, stand or take a brief walk every 30 minutes. If possible, try a standing desk or position your work surface above a treadmill. [Studies](#) show that an hour of moderate exercise a day counters the effects of too much sitting.

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