

Cancer-causing compounds found in everyday food: EU agency

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Cancer-causing chemical compounds called nitrosamines have been detected in a range of everyday foods and could pose a health risk to consumers, the European Food Safety Agency warned on Tuesday.

The 10 nitrosamines—which are not intentionally added to food but

which can form during its preparation and processing—are carcinogenic and also genotoxic, which means they may damage DNA, according to a new study conducted by the European Union agency.

"Our assessment concludes that for all age groups across the EU population, the level of exposure to nitrosamines in food raises a health concern," said Dieter Schrenk, chair of the EFSA's panel on contaminants in the [food chain](#).

"Based on animal studies, we considered the incidence of liver tumors in rodents as the most critical health effect," he added.

Nitrosamines have been detected in foods including cured meat, processed fish, cocoa, beer and other [alcoholic drinks](#), the EFSA said.

The "most important food group" contributing to nitrosamines exposure is meat, it said.

Schrenk said the research deployed "a [worst-case scenario](#)" assuming that all nitrosamines detected in food had the potential to cause cancer as the most harmful form of the compound—"although that is unlikely".

The EFSA added that there were "knowledge gaps" about the presence of nitrosamines in some food groups.

It advised a [balanced diet](#) with a wide variety of foods to reduce consumption of nitrosamines.

The EFSA said its opinion will be shared with the European Commission—the EU's executive arm—which will in turn discuss potential risk management measures with nations in the 27-member bloc.

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