

Oral Cancer

Are You at Risk?

What Are the Signs
& Symptoms?

Should You Have
an Oral Cancer
Exam?

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES**

National Institutes of Health

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research
National Cancer Institute

About Oral Cancer

The term oral cancer includes cancers of the mouth and the pharynx, part of the throat. About two-thirds of oral cancers occur in the mouth and about one-third are found in the pharynx.

Oral cancer will be diagnosed in an estimated 35,000 Americans this year and will cause approximately 7,500 deaths.

Oral cancer can spread quickly. On average, 60 percent of those with the disease will survive more than 5 years.

Oral cancer most often occurs in people over the age of 40 and affects more than twice as many men as women.

Lower Your Risk

Most oral cancer is preventable. 75 percent of oral cancers are related to tobacco use, alcohol use, or use of both substances together. Using both tobacco and alcohol puts you at much greater risk than using either substance alone.



Do not use tobacco products — cigarettes, chew or snuff, pipes or cigars. Tobacco *in all forms* plays a role in oral cancers.



If you drink alcohol, do so only in moderation. Excessive alcohol use can increase your risk of oral cancer.



Use lip balm that contains sunscreen. Exposure to sunlight is a risk factor for lip cancer.



Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. Eating lots of fruits and vegetables as part of a low-fat, high fiber diet may help reduce cancer risk. The National Cancer Institute suggests eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

Possible Signs & Symptoms

See a dentist or physician if any of the following symptoms lasts for more than 2 weeks.

- A sore, irritation, lump or thick patch in your mouth, lip, or throat
- A white or red patch in your mouth
- A feeling that something is caught in your throat
- Difficulty chewing or swallowing
- Difficulty moving your jaw or tongue
- Numbness in your tongue or other areas of your mouth
- Swelling of your jaw that causes dentures to fit poorly or become uncomfortable
- Pain in one ear without hearing loss

Early Detection

It is important to find oral cancer as early as possible when it can be treated more successfully.

An oral cancer examination can detect early signs of cancer. Oral cancer exams are painless and quick — and take only a few minutes.

Your regular dental check-up is an excellent opportunity to have the exam. During the exam, your dentist or dental hygienist will check your face, neck, lips, and entire mouth for possible signs of cancer.

Some parts of the pharynx are not visible during an oral cancer exam. Talk to your dentist about whether a specialist should check your pharynx.

For additional copies of this pamphlet contact:

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