

Oral Cancer

Oral Cancer can affect any part of your mouth, including your lip, your tongue, under your tongue, and in the internal parts of the cheeks.

Oral Cancer frequently goes unnoticed in its early, curable stages. This is because pain is usually not an early symptom of the disease.

Oral cancer usually occurs in people with or without natural teeth, who are over 45 years old, but it can develop at any age.

The primary causes for oral cancers are:

- Sun exposure;
- Use of tobacco;
- Heavy alcohol use (more than 4 drinks per day); and
- The combination of heavy tobacco and alcohol use.

Early signs

The following signs and symptoms may be caused by cancer:

- A sore on the lip or in the mouth that does not heal after 2 weeks;
- A lump or thickness on the lip, tongue or throat;
- A white or red patch on the gums, tongue, or lining of the mouth;
- Unusual bleeding, pain, or numbness in the mouth;
- A sore throat that does not go away, or a feeling that something is caught in

the throat; and/or

- Difficulty or pain with chewing or swallowing or moving your tongue that does not go away; and/or
- Persisted hoarseness during speech.

These signs and symptoms could also be caused by less serious problems. For example, not all ulcers or painful areas in the mouth are signs of cancer.

How can you help to prevent oral cancer?

- If you are outdoors a lot, use sun block on your lips.
- Wear a hat with a wide brim to block the sun's harmful rays.
- Stop using tobacco. If you quit smoking, even after many years of use, you can greatly reduce the risk of oral cancer.
- Cut back on the amount of alcohol you drink.
- Try not to drink and smoke at the same time.
- Self-examination is very important because the disease frequently goes unnoticed in its early, curable stages.

Take a moment each day to check how your mouth looks and feels. For example, when brushing and flossing check for red or white patches on your cheek, gums or tongue.

If at any time you notice any suspicious changes in the appearance of your mouth such as a sore that doesn't heal within two weeks or a lump anywhere in your mouth, contact your dentist or health professional immediately.