

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:

National Institute of Dental and
Craniofacial Research
National Oral Health
Information Clearinghouse
1 NOHIC Way
Bethesda, MD 20892-3500
301-402-7364
www.nidcr.nih.gov

**This publication is not copyrighted.
Make as many photocopies as you need.**



National Institute of Dental
and Craniofacial Research



NIH Publication No: 06-5032
Reprinted July 2006

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 28,000 Americans this year and will cause approximately 7,000 deaths. It is the 6th most common cancer in men and the 14th most common cancer in women.

Oral cancer can spread quickly. On average, 59 percent of those with the disease will survive more than five years.

Oral cancer most often occurs in people over the age of 40 and affects 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 two 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