

**Monthly
Wellness
SpotLight
by PSA**



YOUR ORAL HEALTH IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOU—TAKE CARE OF YOUR MOUTH!

According to the Oral Cancer Foundation, close to 54,000 Americans will be diagnosed with mouth/oral cancer this year. It will cause over 9,750 deaths, killing about one person every 24 hours. Only about half of those diagnosed will be alive in five years. If it is caught EARLY, mouth/oral cancer is cured in 80 to 90 percent of people, but if it is caught in the later stages, the survival rate drops to 40%.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms are a sore in the mouth that does not heal and pain in the mouth that does not subside. In addition, the following symptoms may be present:

- A lump in the cheek
- A white or red patch anywhere in your mouth, including your gums, tongue, or tonsils
- A sore throat
- Difficulty swallowing or feeling like something is caught in your throat
- Pain in the jaw or tongue that can be accompanied with difficulty moving
- Numbness anywhere in your mouth
- Dentures won't fit properly and become uncomfortable due to swelling or sores
- Loosening of the teeth or pain around the teeth or jaw
- Hoarseness or change in voice
- Swollen lymph nodes or a mass in your neck or jaw
- Unexplained weight loss
- Persistent bad breath despite good mouth care

These symptoms may be caused by things other than cancer; however, if you experience any of the above for two weeks or more, see your health care provider.

What are the risk factors?

- Smoking (cigarettes, cigars, pipes)--Nearly all who develop this cancer will have used tobacco in their life. The longer tobacco is used, the greater chance of developing cancer anywhere in the mouth, lips throat, jaw, larynx (voice box), and esophagus.
- Oral tobacco (snuff, dip, spit, chew)--can cause cancers of the cheek, gums, and inner surface of the lips, as well as gum disease and tooth loss.

- Alcohol--According to the American Cancer Society, about seven out of 10 patients with oral cancer were heavy drinkers.
- Human Papillomavirus (HPV) – HPV is made up of more than 150 different viruses. The type of growth they form is a papilloma or wart. Infection with HPV can lead to cancer, including mouth and oral cancer.
- Gender—It is more common in men than women.
- Age – It takes a while for the cancer to grow, so it's usually found in those 55 and over.
- Ultraviolet Light (UV Light) – Sunlight can lead to cancer of the lips.
- Diet low in fruits and vegetables
- Weakened Immune System

How Can I Prevent Mouth/Oral Cancer?

Not all mouth and oral cancer can be prevented, but the risk can be greatly reduced by avoiding the risk factors, especially tobacco and excessive alcohol. If you drink AND smoke, the risk may be as much as 100 times higher than those who don't. If you need help with tobacco cessation, the American Cancer Society offers a [variety of programs](#).

It's important to eat a healthy diet full of vegetables and fruits, to use lip balm with sunscreen when outdoors, and to have your dentures adjusted if they aren't fitting properly. Everyone should see a dentist at least once (preferably twice) a year. Regular checkups are an important chance for your dentist to check for signs of oral cancer. Catching cancerous spots early may mean the difference between life and death.

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