

## What is Oral Cancer?

Oral cancer refers to those cancers that occur in the mouth and parts of the throat. Oral cancer can spread quickly and on average only half of those diagnosed will survive five years. It is steadily increasing in prevalence over the last 30 years. Hence prevention is essential. In the UK it accounts for 2% of all malignancies affecting about 2500 people per year. This makes it the sixth most common cancer in men with a male female ratio of 3:2. It occurs mainly in those over 40 years old. Knowing the risk factors and what to look for may go a long way in helping to prevent this disease.

## What to look for?

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

- A feeling that your teeth do not fit together properly
- Difficulty or pain with chewing or swallowing
- Difficulty in moving your jaw.
- Swelling of the jaw that causes dentures to fit poorly or become uncomfortable
- A change in the voice; and/or
- Pain in the ear
- Enlargement of a neck lymph gland
- Numbness in your tongue or other areas of your mouth
- Sudden unexplained weight loss

*Pictures below show the typical appearance of cancer on the lower lip and side of the tongue.*

If any of these lasts for more than 2 weeks it is wise to contact your dentist. It is important not to confuse discomfort from dentures with a sinister lesion.



## What increases my risk?

Oral cancer is highly preventable. Between 75% and 95% are related directly to the use of tobacco and alcohol.

**Tobacco** – In all forms including chewing betel puts you at significantly higher risk. Chemicals associated with cancer have been detected in all forms of tobacco. Smoking is the biggest single cause of oral cancer.

**Alcohol** - If you drink alcohol, do so only in moderation. Excessive alcohol use can increase your risk of oral cancer. In combination with smoking the risk increases substantially.

**Sunlight** – As with skin cancer repeated exposure of the sun may increase the risk of a lesion developing. Protect the lips with lip balm.

**Diet** – Eating a diet high in fruit and vegetables may help reduce cancer risk.

**Age** – Oral cancer risk increases with age, 98% of cancers are seen in those over 40 years old.

**Others** - Other possible risk factors in the development of oral cancer include genetics, liver function and certain medications.

### Early Detection

You can take an active role in detecting the signs or symptoms by periodically examining the lips, gums, tongue and cheek areas looking for any of the signs noted above.

**Dental check ups** – Regular dental attendance will mean your dentist will check for signs every 6 months. As part of your regular dental examination, your dentist can quickly and easily check the oral tissues including the neck, lips and mouth for signs of cancerous and precancerous lesions. Early detection is critical in treating the disease more effectively and successfully and can be carried out painlessly and quickly.

It is important for your dentist to assess other less sinister conditions found in the mouth that have the ability to become cancerous later.

Early treatment of these cancers may substantially improve the outcome, however removal of the affected area does not necessarily remove the problem and in some cases very extensive surgery is required.

### Want to know more?

Further advice can be obtained from your dentist or doctor regarding risk factors and help with tackling smoking and alcohol use.

Further information leaflets area available.



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# Preventing Oral Cancer

What to look for  
Risk Factors

 **Addison Dental Practice**  
Orthodontics, NHS and Private General Dentistry