

What You Should Know About Oral Cancer



Every hour, one person in the United States dies of oral, or pharyngeal, cancer.¹ Although the survival rates have increased since the 1960s, they are still relatively low — the five-year survival rate of those diagnosed is only 60%.² Learn what to look out for so you can protect yourself and your family.

Risk factors

- Tobacco use (including cigarettes, pipes, cigars and chewing tobacco)
- Heavy alcohol consumption
- Human papilloma virus (HPV) infection
- Prolonged sun exposure
- Family history of oral cancer
- Diet low in fruits and vegetables
- Chewing betel nut (also known as betel quid or areca nut)

Groups at risk

- **Men.** Oral cancer affects men at twice the rate of women.
- **African Americans.** Black men face the highest risk of developing oral cancer³ and die at a higher rate than their white counterparts.⁴
- **Adults over 40.** Risk of oral cancer increases with age.

¹ "SEER Stat Fact Sheets: Oral Cavity and Pharynx Cancer." National Cancer Institute. <http://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/oralcav.html>

² Source: National Institute of Health's National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research article, "Oral Cancer 5-Year Survival Rates by Race, Gender, and Stage of Diagnosis"

³ Are You At Risk for Oral Cancer? What African American Men Need to Know. National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/oralhealth/Topics/OralCancer/AfricanAmericanMen/oral_exam_brochure.htm

⁴ Oral Cancer 5-Year Survival Rates by Race, Gender, and Stage of Diagnosis. National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. <http://nidcr.nih.gov/DataStatistics/FindDataByTopic/OralCancer/OralCancer5YearSurvivalRates.htm>



Types

Oral cancer can develop in different parts of your mouth, including:

- Lips
- Floor or roof of the mouth
- Tongue
- Inside the cheeks
- Gums

Treatment options

Several treatment options are available, depending on the size and location of the tumor and extent of the cancer:

- **Surgery:** Removes the cancerous tumors from your mouth and lymph nodes.
- **Radiation:** Uses high-energy waves (like x-rays) to kill cancer cells and prevent them from spreading. May also be used to reduce a tumor before surgery.
- **Chemotherapy:** Uses chemicals to kill cancer cells and cancer from spreading to other parts of the body. May be used along with radiation to increase effectiveness, or after surgery to destroy any cancer cells left behind.

Look for warning signs

- A sore in your mouth that lasts longer than two weeks
- Swelling, growth or lumps in or near your mouth or neck
- White or red patches on your lips or in your mouth
- Bleeding from your mouth or throat
- Persistent hoarseness or difficulty swallowing

See your dentist if you experience any of these symptoms.



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