



Patient Information Sheet: Oral and Oropharyngeal Cancer

The American Academy of Oral Medicine

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ABOUT THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ORAL MEDICINE

AAOM was founded in 1945 as the American Academy of Dental Medicine. In 1966, the Academy adopted its current name. The members of the American Academy of Oral Medicine include an internationally recognized group of health care professionals concerned with the oral health care of chronic oral diseases and medically complex patients. Oral Medicine is the discipline of dentistry concerned with the oral health care of medically complex patients and with the diagnosis and non-surgical management of medically-related disorders or conditions affecting the oral and maxillofacial region.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

American Cancer Society website: http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/CRI_0.asp

The Oral Cancer Foundation website: <http://www.oralcancerfoundation.org>



Oral and Oropharyngeal Cancer

Fact: Every hour oral or oropharyngeal cancer claims a life in the U.S.

Question: Are you at risk for developing oral or oropharyngeal cancer?

WHO GETS ORAL CANCER?

More than 30,000 cases of oral cavity and oropharyngeal cancer are diagnosed annually and over 7,400 people succumb each year to these cancers. The most common sites for occurrence are the tongue, the lip, and the floor of the mouth. Men are afflicted twice as often as women and African-Americans are at greater risk than Caucasians. Most patients are 55 years of age or older when diagnosed, but approximately one-third are under the age of 55.

WHAT CAUSES ORAL CANCER?

Oral cancer is the result of uncontrolled growth of cells. The cells typically affected are the skin (squamous epithelial) cells that line the oral cavity. Although the exact cause of oral cancer is not known, several factors increase the risk of acquiring the disease. Some of these factors, such as chronic tobacco smoking and alcohol use, may be controlled, while others such as aging can not. Human papillomavirus infection and poor oral hygiene can also increase the risk of developing oral cancer.

TREATMENT

Oral cancer is best treated by a team of health care professionals. This team may include a head and neck surgeon, an oral surgeon, an oncologist, a prosthodontist, a nutritionist, a social worker, and other health professionals. One of the first goals in treating oral cancer is to determine the extent of the disease. This process is called “staging” and is based on the size of the tumor, the number and location of any lymph nodes, and the presence of any distant (metastatic) lesions. Once the cancer is staged, a treatment plan can be developed and implemented. Routinely available treatment options include surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy either alone or in combination.



Early cancer, 63 year old female.



Advanced cancer of tongue.



Oral and Oropharyngeal Cancer

WHAT YOU CAN DO

To reduce your risk of developing oral and oropharyngeal cancer all individuals should:

- Stop / reduce exposure to all tobacco products
- Stop or limit intake of alcoholic beverages
- Avoid or reduce exposure to ultraviolet rays reaching the lips by limiting sun exposure and wearing a broad-spectrum sunscreen / lip balm
- Eliminate sources of oral irritation such as broken restorations and poor fitting dentures
- Ensure your dentist performs an oral cancer screening examination during your routine check-ups.
- Have your teeth professionally cleaned on a schedule recommended by your dentist.
- Perform a monthly self-check and report to your dentist if you note any of the following:
 - a sore in the mouth that does not heal (most common symptom)
 - pain in the mouth that doesn't go away (also very common)
 - a persistent lump or thickening in the cheek
 - a persistent white or red patch on the gums, tongue, tonsil, or lining of the mouth
 - a sore throat or a feeling that something is caught in the throat that doesn't go away
 - difficulty chewing or swallowing
 - difficulty moving the jaw or tongue
 - numbness of the tongue or other area of the mouth
 - swelling of the jaw that causes dentures to fit poorly or become uncomfortable
 - loosening of the teeth or pain around the teeth or jaw
 - voice changes
 - a lump or mass in the neck
 - weight loss
 - persistent bad breath

WORDS OF WISDOM

- » If you are over the age of 40 years, smoke tobacco, or drink alcohol you should make sure that you receive an oral cancer exam annually.
- » If you have a suspicious sore spot or unexplained lesion in your mouth, you should be evaluated by your dentist within 2 weeks