

Common symptoms of mouth cancer².

- 1 A sore or ulcer in the mouth that persists more than three weeks.
- 2 A white or red patch on the gums, tongue, or lining of the mouth.
- 3 A lump anywhere in the mouth.
- 4 Swelling of the jaw that causes dentures to fit poorly or become uncomfortable.
- 5 Difficulty in chewing or moving the jaw or tongue.
- 6 Numbness of the tongue or mouth.
- 7 A feeling that something is caught in the throat.
- 8 Difficulty in swallowing.
- 9 A chronic sore throat or voice change (hoarseness) that persists more than six weeks.
- 10 Neck swelling present that persists more than three weeks.
- 11 Unexplained tooth mobility persisting for more than three weeks - *see a dentist urgently.*
- 12 Persistent nasal obstruction/mucus causing difficulty breathing through nose.
- 13 Unexplained earache.

Visit your dentist or doctor at once if you notice any abnormal problems or are not sure.



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Mouth Cancer Foundation

Registered Charity No. 1109298

The Mouth Cancer Foundation provides practical advice and support for head and neck cancer patients through its website www.mouthcancerfoundation.org and telephone helpline +44 (0)1924 950 950



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What is Mouth Cancer?

This is the general term given to the variety of malignant head and neck tumours that develop in the mouth (oral cavity), throat (pharynx), voice box (larynx), salivary glands, nose and sinuses.^{1,2} In the UK, mouth cancer kills more people than cervical cancer and testicular cancer combined.³ Once discovered, treatment options vary and will depend on how early the cancer is diagnosed or detected. Removal of the tumour, followed by radiotherapy may be suitable for smaller tumours; chemotherapy is required in more advanced cases. The overall long-term survival rate is 50% after 5 years, but early detection greatly improves prognosis.⁴

Risk Factors

The most important aetiological factors are tobacco usage and excess consumption of alcohol, and these factors together are thought to account for about 75% of oral cancer cases in Europe.⁵

Tobacco

At least 75% of patients diagnosed with oral cavity and oropharyngeal cancers are tobacco users. Smokers have 6-times greater risk, and those using chewing tobacco or chewing paan/gutkha also have increased risk levels.⁵

Alcohol

In the UK, 6% of cancer deaths are caused by alcohol.⁵ Heavy drinkers have a 5-10 times greater risk of developing cancer but even small amounts of alcohol (as little as 1 unit a day) can increase the risk.⁶ Individuals who use tobacco and alcohol face a 30-times greater risk than abstainers.⁵

Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

Most HPV infections go away on their own without causing any type of abnormality but persistent infection with certain types of the Human Papilloma virus (HPV), a group of viruses, is now recognized as the major cause of cervical cancer. Having many sexual partners is a risk factor for HPV infection.⁸ Evidence is emerging that HPV is linked to some mouth cancers. Studies have shown that oral HPV infection is a strong risk factor for oropharyngeal cancer (cancer that forms in the middle part of the throat and includes the soft palate, the base of the tongue, and the tonsils).⁹

Dr Vinod K Joshi, Founder of the Mouth Cancer Foundation, states:

“A high proportion of oropharyngeal cancers in nonsmokers and younger adults have been associated with HPV. The mode of transmission may be frequent oral sex in adolescents and young adults.”

Key Statistics about Mouth Cancer in UK

1. Mouth cancer is one of the top ten most commonly diagnosed cancers and accounts for more than 7,800 new cases each year.⁷
2. Incidence has risen by 25% over the past 10 years.⁷
3. 5-year survival rate has hardly improved (50% overall) for the last few decades.⁴
4. Mouth cancer is more common in men than women. However, the sex ratio in the UK has decreased rapidly from around 5:1 fifty years ago to less than 2:1 today.⁷

References:

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