

Oral Cancer



**B**

ecause the mouth is a region where changes can be easily seen, oral cancer can be detected in the early stages. Performing a self-examination regularly will help in early recognition.

Oral and maxillofacial surgeons recommend that everyone do an oral cancer self-exam once a month. If you are at a high risk for oral cancer—smoker, consumer of alcohol, user of smokeless tobacco—you should also see your oral and maxillofacial surgeon for an exam yearly.

The things to look for when performing an oral cancer self-examination are:

- reddish patches - erythroplasia
- whitish patches - leukoplakia
- a sore that fails to heal and bleeds easily
- a lump or thickening of the tissues
- chronic sore throat or hoarseness
- difficulty in chewing or swallowing

To complete an oral examination, using a bright light and a mirror:

- remove any dentures
- look and feel inside of lips, the front of gums
- tilt head back to look at and feel the roof of your mouth
- pull the cheek out to see the inside and also to see the back gums
- put out your tongue, look at all surfaces

- feel for lumps or enlarged lymph nodes (glands) in both sides of the neck and under the lower jaw

EARLY DETECTION AND TREATMENT MEAN A BETTER CHANCE OF CURE

If you have any of the aforementioned signs, see your oral and maxillofacial surgeon.

Should the oral and maxillofacial surgeon agree that something looks suspicious, a biopsy may be recommended. This is a procedure that involves the removal of a piece of the suspicious tissue. The piece is then sent to a pathology laboratory for microscopic examination in order to make an accurate diagnosis of the problem.

The biopsy report not only helps in establishing a diagnosis, but enables the doctor to make a treatment plan specifically designed for the type of lesion diagnosed.

FACTORS THAT MAY CAUSE CANCER

Research has determined a number of factors that may contribute to the development of oral cancer. The most common are the use of tobacco and alcohol. Others include poor oral hygiene, irritation caused by ill-fitting dentures and rough surfaces on teeth, poor nutrition and combinations of these factors.

Studies have shown that the death rate from oral cancer is about four times higher for cigarette smokers than for

nonsmokers. It is also widely believed in the medical field that the heat generated by smoking pipes and cigars irritates the mouth and can lead to lip cancer.

Those at an especially high risk of contracting oral cancer are males over 40 years of age who are combination heavy drinkers and smokers, or users of smokeless tobacco.

Keep in mind that your mouth is one of your body's most important early warning systems. Don't ignore any suspicious lumps or sores. Should you discover something, make an appointment for a prompt examination. Early treatment may well be the key to complete recovery. ●



**American Association of Oral
and Maxillofacial Surgeons**

9700 W. Bryn Mawr Avenue
Rosemont, Illinois 60018-5701
847/678-6200 Fax: 847/678-6286
Website: www.aaoms.org