

### Oral cancer

Mouth cancer, also known as oral cancer, is where a tumour develops in a part of the mouth. It may be on the surface of the tongue, the inside of the cheeks, the roof of the mouth (palate), the lips or gums. Growths known as tumours can also develop in the glands that produce saliva, the tonsils at the back of the mouth, and the part of the throat connecting your mouth to your windpipe (pharynx). However, these are less common. Other types of cancers that affect the head and neck are:

- cancer of the larynx – the voice box
- cancer of the nasopharynx – the area at the back of the nose that forms the top part of the throat (pharynx)
- cancer of the oropharynx – the part of the throat that is directly behind the mouth
- cancer of the hypopharynx – the part of the throat that is directly behind the larynx
- cancer of the thyroid gland – a butterfly-shaped gland on either side of the windpipe
- cancer of the nose and sinuses
- cancer of the oesophagus – the food pipe.

At every dental examination or check-up appointment, your dentist will be looking and checking for any irregular lumps and bumps and any abnormal looking tissue. If something doesn't look quite right they will often see you for a review appointment two weeks after your check up or they may refer you to a specialist for a second opinion and your piece of mind.

### **What are signs and symptoms of mouth cancer?**

- mouth ulcers that do not heal for several weeks these may or may not be painful
- unexplained, persistent lumps in the mouth or the neck that do not go away
- unexplained loose teeth or sockets that do not heal after extractions
- unexplained, persistent numbness or an odd feeling on the lip or tongue
- white or red patches on the lining of the mouth or tongue – could be normal but good to get checked
- changes in speech, such as a lisp
- a persistent cough
- difficulty swallowing

See a GP or dentist if these symptoms do not get better within 3 weeks, particularly if you drink or smoke. To be able to treat mouth cancer successfully, early diagnosis is key so it is important to act quickly. If mouth cancer is diagnosed early, a complete cure is often possible in up to 9 in 10 cases using surgery alone, do not put off going to see a health professional if you do have any doubts or concerns.

### **Is mouth cancer preventable?**

No cancer is 100% preventable. However research has shown that there are lots of predisposing factors that can put you more at risk of developing cancers such as:

- smoking
- increased alcohol intake

- being overweight/obesity
- chewing tobacco
- poor diet (high in fats and processed foods)
- a sedentary lifestyle
- a predisposing factor specifically increasing your risk of mouth cancer is contracting the human papilloma virus (HPV).

The government has recognised these factors and have launched various campaigns to help people stay healthy and reduce their risk of getting cancer.

**For more information see the links below:**

[Home | Change4Life – NHS www.nhs.uk › change4life](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life)

[Find stop smoking services in England](#) - Call the free Smokefree National Helpline on 0300 123 1044.

**Drinkline** is the national alcohol helpline. If you're worried about your own or someone else's drinking, you can call this free helpline in complete confidence. Call 0300 123 1110 (weekdays 9am to 8pm, weekends 11am to 4pm).



One small step is a free service within Devon to improve health and wellbeing through smoking cessation, drinking less, being a healthy weight and being active. To find out more or to access this service visit: <https://www.onesmallstep.org.uk/> call: 0800 298 2654 or email: [hello@onesmallstep.org.uk](mailto:hello@onesmallstep.org.uk)

For information on how smoking and alcohol can impact your oral health, please see our oral health and general health page. **Further advice and helpful support links can be found on that NHS choices website – [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)**

<http://www.dentalhealth.org>  
<https://www.nhs.uk>

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