Oral Cancer Prevention

Oral cavity and oropharyngeal cancers are typically treated with surgery and drug therapy, such as radiation and chemotherapy. However, like other cancers, prevention and early detection is your best defense.

You can prevent oral cancers by:
- Not smoking or using any tobacco products
- Drinking alcohol in moderation
- Eating a well-balanced diet
- Limiting your exposure to sun
- Wearing UV-A/B-blocking sun screen on your skin and lips when in the sun

Taking an active role in your health can also lead to early detection and improve the chances of successful treatment of cancer. Do you know the symptoms of oral cancers? The most common include:
- Swelling/thickening, lumps or bumps, rough spots or eroded areas of the lips, gums or other areas inside the mouth
- Velvety white, red, or speckled patches in the mouth
- Unexplained loss of feeling or pain/tenderness in the face, mouth or neck
- Persistent sores on the face, neck or mouth that don’t heal within two weeks
- Difficulty chewing or swallowing, or moving the jaw or tongue

Do your part to detect oral and oropharyngeal cancers early, by:
- Knowing the symptoms
- Conducting self-exams at home at least once a month, using a bright light to look at and feel all parts of your mouth, including your lips, tongue, teeth, gums and throat
- Feeling for lumps or enlarged lymph nodes in your neck and lower jaw
- Calling your dentist’s office if you notice any changes or symptoms
- Seeing your dentist regularly and requesting a cancer screening

FACTS ABOUT ORAL CANCERS

According to the American Cancer Society:
- An estimated 9,700 people will die from oral cavity or oropharyngeal cancers in 2017.
- Oral cancers are more than twice as common in men as in women.
- There has been a recent rise in cases of oropharyngeal cancer linked to the human papilloma virus (HPV).
- The death rate for oral cancers has decreased over the last 30 years.
- The average age of most people diagnosed with oral cancers is 62, but they can occur in young people too.
- Oral cavity cancers most often occur in the tongue, gums and other parts of the mouth.

DidUKnow?

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Information Sources

According to the American Cancer Society’s most recent estimate, about 50,000 people in the United States will get oral cavity or oropharyngeal cancers in 2017.

Oral cavity cancers start in the mouth, including the lips, the inside lining of the lips and cheeks, the teeth and gums, most of the tongue, the roof and the floor of the mouth below the tongue.

Oropharyngeal cancer starts in the oropharynx, which is the part of the throat just behind the mouth where the oral cavity stops. Oropharyngeal cancers affect the base of the tongue, the back part of the roof of the mouth, the tonsils, and the side and back wall of the throat.

Dentists can conduct oral and oropharyngeal cancer screenings during routine visits. They will feel for any lumps or irregular tissue changes in your neck, head, face, and oral cavity and look for any sores or discolored tissue. These exams are vital to detecting and treating cancer early before it has a chance to spread, so it is very important that you see your dentist regularly.