

Mouth cancer



What is it?

Mouth cancer is a dangerous abnormal growth that can affect any part of the mouth.

What are the signs of mouth cancer?

Mouth cancer can appear as:

- An ulcer that fails to clear up after about three weeks.
- A growth or swelling which has been present for more than about three weeks.
- Sometimes as a white or red patch in the mouth.

Most things like this will not turn out to be cancer, but if you have these signs they must be investigated by going to your dentist immediately.

Am I at risk from mouth cancer?

- If you use tobacco (smoked or chewed) or chew Pan/Betel nut, you could be at risk. Drinking alcohol will also increase your risk of mouth cancer. If you do more than one, your chances of getting it are vastly increased.
- Prolonged exposure to sunlight can increase your risk of lip and skin cancer.
- The chances of getting mouth cancer are greater for people aged over 40 years, but younger people can get it too.

- You are more at risk of cancer if you don't eat a healthy diet.

How can mouth cancer be detected?

Your dentist can spot mouth cancer early. Your chances of survival are as high as 90 percent with early detection, compared to only 50 percent if it is diagnosed late. Over 8,000 people are now diagnosed with mouth cancer per year in the UK and, unlike for most cancers, the number of cases is increasing.

What will my dentist do?

You should expect your dentist to:

- Look at your face and neck.
- Feel under your jaw and down your neck.
- Examine the inside of your mouth with a small mirror, looking at your lips, cheeks, tongue, the roof of your mouth and your throat. Your dentist can see parts of your mouth that you can't easily see or feel yourself. Your dentist may notice something in your mouth that needs to be monitored or needs to be seen by a specialist.

What are the benefits of being regularly checked?

Regular examinations mean that your dentist can spot problems early - and these include mouth cancer.

How can I prevent mouth cancer?

By following a healthy diet, with five to seven portions of fruit and vegetables each day, you can help to prevent mouth cancer as well as many other cancers and diseases. (A portion is roughly a handful.)

Do not use tobacco at all and reduce your alcohol consumption as much as possible, keeping your weekly intake to below 14 units, spread over at least three days. (One unit is roughly equal to a single measure of spirit, a half pint of beer or a small glass of wine.)