

## Signs and Symptoms

In the early stages of oral cancer's development, it often is painless, and the physical signs may not be obvious. This makes it a very dangerous disease. Regular screenings by a qualified medical or dental professional, combined with a person's knowledge of the warning signs and symptoms, will allow its discovery in the earliest possible stages, when cure and survival are most favorable. Even pre-cancerous tissue changes can be detected by a trained professional.

### Early indicators

1. Red and/or white discolorations of the soft tissues of the mouth
2. Any sore which does not heal within 14 days
3. Hoarseness which lasts for a prolonged period of time

### Advanced indicators

1. A persistent sensation that something is stuck on your throat
2. Numbness in the oral region
3. Difficulty in moving the jaw or tongue
4. Difficulty in swallowing
5. Ear pain which occurs on one side only
6. A sore under a denture, which even after adjustment of the denture, still does not heal
7. A lump or thickening which develops in the mouth or on the neck

## Further Information

For additional information please reference the following websites, or ask your dental professional:

- The Oral Cancer Foundation: <http://oralcancerfoundation.org/>
- Support People with Oral Head and Neck Cancer (SPOHNC): [www.spoync.org](http://www.spoync.org)



## Oral, Head & Neck Cancer Awareness



## *Oral Cancer Awareness*

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## Oral Health Equals Overall Health

Each year in the US alone, approximately 42,000 individuals are newly diagnosed with oral cancer, with only a 50% five year survival rate. This type of cancer is the sixth deadliest in the world, with an average of one American dying from it each hour. It is particularly deadly as most cases are not diagnosed until the late stages of the disease. However, with early detection, patient survival rates increase significantly. Annual oral cancer exams, especially for those with higher risk factors, are vital in the battle against cancer.



### Risk Factors

Avoiding known risk factors greatly reduces ones chance of developing oral cancer. The most common risk factors associated with oral cancer are:

1. **Tobacco use.** In all its forms, tobacco is a major contributor to the development of oral cancer. Not using tobacco is one of the most important choices you can make when it comes to decreasing your likelihood of developing oral cancer.

2. **Excessive alcohol consumption.** Drinking more than 15 alcoholic beverages a week may put you at greater risk for developing oral cancer. If you do choose to drink, do so in moderation.
3. **The combined use of tobacco and alcohol.** This significantly increases the risk of oral cancer more then either by itself.
4. **Excessive unprotected exposure to sun** can increase the likelihood of lip cancers. Use at least SPF 30 sunblock on your lips.
5. **HPV viral infection.** The human papilloma virus (HPV) is one of the most common virus groups affecting skin and mucosal body areas. Two types of HPV (HPV16 and HPV18) are known to cause the vast majority of cervical cancers, and new studies show that HPV16 is also linked to oral cancer. In fact, the HPV positive group is the fastest growing segment of the oral cancer population. This is particularly true among the young population, as young as age 22, of non-smoking oral cancer patients.

### What You Can do to Ameliorate these Risk Factors

If you currently smoke or drink excessively (more than 15 alcoholic drinks a week) there are a variety of places you can go to seek support including:

- Smoke-Free USA: <http://www.smokefree.gov/>
- Smoke-Free Illinois: [http://www.idph.state.il.us/smokefree/sf\\_quit.ht](http://www.idph.state.il.us/smokefree/sf_quit.ht)
- Alcoholics Anonymous: <http://www.aa.org>
- Speaking to your primary healthcare provider



With regards to HPV, new vaccines have been developed to help prevent infection, particularly in young women. Studies show that vaccines are nearly 100% effective in preventing pre-cancerous changes of the cervix, vulva and vagina associated with HPV types 16 and 18. Evidence has also shown that these vaccines, including Gardasil, are safe and exhibit no serious side effects. Gardasil is being offered to both females and males age 9 -26.



Another important decision you can make in preventing oral cancer is to have annual screening done at your dentist office. Unlike many other cancer screening procedures, the technique for testing for oral cancer is noninvasive and without discomfort or pain. At Kenneth N. Milin, D.D.S. & Associates, we perform an oral cancer screening at each of your preventive care visits. This includes a visual and tactile inspection of your oral cavity, with a particular focus on the tongue and pharynx as these are the most common sites for oral cancer.

