

Detect oral cancer early

According to the American Cancer Society, more than a third of all women and nearly half of all men in the United States will hear the devastating news of a cancer diagnosis during their lifetimes.¹ This group includes the nearly 36,000 Americans who are diagnosed with oral cancer each year.² Yet oral cancer is one of the more treatable cancers when it is detected in its early stages.

Why early detection matters

Less than half of all oral cancer patients fully recover, and those who do often experience facial disfigurement or other life-altering complications. More than 7,500 Americans die from oral cancer each year, and the five-year survival rate is only 60 percent.² Early diagnosis of oral cancer is the answer; if caught early, the five-year survival rate jumps to 80–90 percent.³

What you should know

Oral cancer can occur in any part of your mouth, including your gums, cheeks, tongue, and lips. It can be difficult to detect because it often begins as a small red or white spot. Other suspicious symptoms can include mouth sores that do not heal.

People who use tobacco products or consume excessive amounts of alcohol tend to have a higher risk for oral cancer, and those who use tobacco products *and* consume excessive alcohol have the highest risk. Yet many oral cancer patients have no known risk factors. According to recent research, the fastest growing segments of the U.S. population being diagnosed are non-smokers under the age of fifty.³

What you can do

Many people visit their dentist more frequently than their physician. This puts dental professionals in a unique position to detect many diseases, including oral cancer.

In addition to doing a thorough examination, your dentist can use a quick and painless diagnostic tool called a brush biopsy to test any unexplained red or white spots in your mouth. This tool can identify and analyze both precancerous and cancerous cells. Other types of biopsies may also be done if the dentist believes they are indicated.

Sources: 1 American Cancer Society, Cancer Statistics 2009 Presentation, <http://www.cancer.org>, accessed March 2010.

2 American Cancer Society. Cancer Facts & Figures 2009. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2009.

3 Oral Cancer Foundation, <http://oralcancerfoundation.org>, accessed March 2010.