

Open up to...

mouth cancer

how to **detect** it early



reduce **the risk**

CANCER RESEARCH UK



Mouth cancer **facts**

Mouth cancer can develop in any part of the mouth including the tongue, gums, tonsils, lining of the mouth, lips and upper part of the throat.

The early signs of mouth cancer can often be seen. When changes are found early there is a very good chance of a cure. This leaflet tells you about the changes to look out for and who is most at risk.

Who is most at risk?

Our lifestyle choices have a big effect on our risk of mouth cancer.

The most important causes of mouth cancer are...

- smoking tobacco (cigarettes, cigars, pipes)
- regularly drinking large amounts of alcohol
- chewing tobacco or betel nut

People who use tobacco *and* drink too much alcohol have the highest risk of mouth cancer. Up to three-quarters of mouth cancers are caused this way.

Mouth cancer is more common in men than women and is rare in people under 40.

Early detection saves lives

It is important to notice changes inside your mouth. Tell your doctor or dentist if they last longer than **three weeks**. Early treatment is simpler and more effective and many people can be cured.

What should I look out for?

Look for the following changes. They may not be painful but you should still see your doctor or dentist if they last longer than **three weeks**.

The most common signs of mouth cancer are...

- an ulcer or sore in your mouth or on your tongue
- a red or white patch in your mouth
- an unexplained pain in your mouth or ear

Other signs to look out for are...

- an unexplained lump in your neck
- a sore or painful throat
- a croaky voice or difficulty swallowing

If you notice any of these changes and they last longer than **three weeks**, tell your doctor or dentist without delay. Usually they are not caused by cancer but it is better to play safe.

Checking **your** mouth

Sometimes the early signs of mouth cancer do not cause pain or discomfort but they can be seen. So it is important to check your mouth for any of the changes.

From time to time, spend a few moments in front of the mirror looking in your mouth. Check your tongue, gums, lining of your cheeks, lips, under your tongue and the roof of your mouth. But remember your dentist can easily check the parts you cannot see.

Your **dentist** can help

Dentists have special training to help them identify health problems and are often the first to spot early changes in their patients. As part of a regular examination, dentists check for the early warning signs of mouth cancer. They will refer patients with suspect changes to hospital for further tests.

If you are over 40, smoke, chew tobacco or betel nut or drink heavily, ask your dentist to check your mouth once a year. It is important to visit the dentist regularly even if you no longer have your own teeth.



Reduce your **risk**

Changes in your mouth

Check your mouth for the changes listed in this leaflet. If they last longer than three weeks, report them to your doctor or dentist without delay. Try to visit your dentist at least once a year.

Smoking, chewing tobacco or betel nut

The best thing is to stop completely. Help is available - talk to your doctor or call **Quitline** on **0800 00 22 00**.

Nicotine replacement products help many people to stop using tobacco. You can buy them at your local chemist, or ask your doctor if you can have them on prescription.

Alcohol

If you drink alcohol, try to follow our guidelines:

- Women should drink **less than two** units of alcohol each day
- Men should drink **less than three** units of alcohol each day

Many alcoholic drinks contain more than one unit:

- A pint of premium lager, beer or cider (5% vol) contains **three** units
- A standard 175ml glass of wine (11-12% vol) contains **two** units
- A double measure of spirits (40% vol) using the 35ml measure contains **three** units

Healthy eating

Try to eat at least five different portions of fruit and vegetables every day. Increase the amount of red, yellow and orange fruit, salads and green vegetables in your diet.

Further **information**

For more about mouth cancer visit our campaign website www.openuptomouthcancer.org

Helplines for people who want to stop smoking...

Quitline (UK)	0800 00 22 00
NHS (England)	0800 169 0 169
NHS (Wales)	02920 641 888
NHS (Scotland)	0800 84 84 84
NHS (N. Ireland)	0800 85 85 85

For more about cancer visit our patient information website www.cancerhelp.org.uk click on 'specific cancers' then 'mouth and oropharyngeal cancer'.

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer call our information nurses. Direct line 020 7061 8355 or freephone 0800 CANCER that is 0800 226237 or email cancer.info@cancer.org.uk

To order copies of this and other cancer awareness leaflets email publications@cancer.org.uk

About Cancer Research UK

Cancer Research UK is the leading charity dedicated to research on the causes, treatment and prevention of cancer. If you would like to support our work please call **020 7121 6699** or visit our website.

www.cancerresearchuk.org
www.reduce therisk.org.uk



Nov 2005

Cancer Research UK registered charity no. 1089464

reduce the risk
CANCER RESEARCH UK 