



Oral Cancer - Alcohol & Tobacco

In the United States, about 36,000 people get oral cancer each year and nearly 8,000 will die from this disease. Only half of the people who have oral cancer live five years after the cancer is found. The survival rate from oral cancer is poorer than many other cancers and has not improved significantly in many years. One reason for the low survival rate is that these cancers are often not detected until they have already spread to other parts of the body.

Men are twice as likely to have oral cancer as women. Patients who use alcohol daily are six times more prone to develop oral cancer than people who drink occasionally. Moderate to heavy drinkers who also smoke tobacco are fifteen times more likely to get oral cancer due to the combined effect of alcohol and tobacco.

Screening for oral cancer is extremely important to find cancers before they have a chance to spread.

Seeing your dentist regularly for an oral cancer check-up is very important. Knowing how to check your own mouth for signs of cancer can also help.

When you brush and floss, take a look at your mouth in the mirror. Stick out your tongue, looking at the top, sides, and underneath for any red, white, or blue spots that look or feel different from the rest of the tongue. You can also feel your lips and cheeks with your fingers for any lumps or bumps. Most of the sores or bumps you will find when you check your mouth will not be cancer. Sores or bumps that do not heal in 10-14 days, however, should be seen by a dentist or medical doctor.

The best way to avoid oral cancer is to avoid doing the things that increase risk, especially smoking and excessive consumption of alcohol. If you feel that you are at risk, ask your healthcare professional to help you quit smoking and reduce alcohol consumption.