

oral cancer facts

According to the Oral Cancer Foundation, close to 36,000 Americans will be diagnosed with oral or pharyngeal cancer this year. Of that number, only slightly more than half will be alive in 5 years.

Oral cancer is particularly dangerous because in its early stages it may not be noticed by the patient, it can prosper without producing pain or symptoms, and it has a high risk of producing second, primary tumors.

Patients who survive a first encounter with the disease have up to a 20 times higher risk of developing a second cancer. This heightened risk factor can last for 5 to 10 years after the first occurrence.



smokeless tobacco is not safe

Campaigns to promote the safety of smokeless tobacco are being initiated, but it is clear that while it may reduce lung cancers, it has a negative effect on the rates of oral cancers, pancreatic cancer and periodontal disease. The chronic infections that smokeless tobacco produces may even link it to heart disease.

oral cancer can affect all ages — even non-tobacco users

Historically, the majority of people with oral cancer were over the age of 40 at the time of discovery. It is also now confirmed that a younger age group, including those who have never used any tobacco products, are at risk. The human papilloma virus, particularly version 16, has now been shown to be sexually transmitted between partners, and is conclusively implicated in the increasing incidence of young non-smoking oral cancer patients.

smoking and alcohol increases risk

When a person combines tobacco with heavy use of alcohol, the risk is significantly increased, as the two act synergistically. Those who both smoke and drink, have a 15 times greater risk of developing oral cancer than others.

signs and symptoms

One of the real dangers of this cancer, is that in its early stages, it can go unnoticed. It can be painless, and physical changes may not be obvious. The good news is, a dentist or doctor can, in most cases, see or feel the precursor tissue changes, or the actual cancer while it is still very small, or in its earliest stages.

Some things as simple as a bite on the inside of your cheek may mimic the look of a dangerous tissue change, it is important to have any sore or discolored area of your mouth, which does not heal within 14 days, looked at by a professional.

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