

Oral Cancer

What is oral cancer?

Oral or mouth cancer occurs more often in older adults age 62 and over. You are more likely to have oral cancer if you smoke, use tobacco products like snuff or dip and/or drink alcohol regularly. However, you can still get oral cancer without drinking or smoking. Both too much UV radiation from the sun and tobacco can also cause lip cancer.

What are the signs?

- A sore does not heal within two weeks or seems to heal but then opens up again in the same place (especially on the lower lip)
- A red, white, or red and white patch on the gums, cheeks, tongue or anywhere in the mouth does not go away within two weeks
- Lumps, bumps or swellings in the mouth appear for no reason and do not go away within two weeks
- Numbness or pain you can't explain
- Problems with chewing, eating or swallowing
- Dentures that suddenly do not fit right
- A sore throat or hoarse voice that does not go away

Most oral cancers are not found when they are small, mainly because you cannot see them easily and they do not hurt. Your dentist and dental hygienist are trained to find these very small cancers before you can see or feel them. You should visit your dentist regularly, at least once or twice a year, for an oral cancer screening examination even if you no longer have any teeth. The screening examination includes all areas of the mouth and also some parts of the head and neck.

How do I prevent oral cancer?

1. If you smoke or use tobacco products, stop now. Discuss how to quit with your doctor or dentist or go to www.smokefree.gov for information on quitting tobacco use.
2. Limit your alcohol intake.
3. Wear a wide brimmed hat and use lip balm that contains a sunscreen.
4. Pay attention to your mouth and call your dentist if you think something is wrong.