

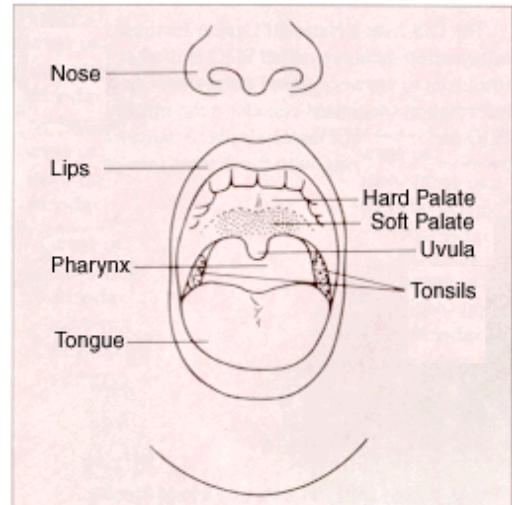
## Oral Cancer and You

### About Oral Cancer:

Oral cancer is the sixth most common cancer in men and the 14th most common cancer in women. It most often occurs in people over the age of 40 but can develop at any age.

Oral cancers include cancers that occur in the mouth and the oropharynx (or-ō-FAIR-inks). The oropharynx is the middle part of the pharynx, which includes three parts: the back of the mouth (soft palate), under the tongue, and the tonsils. Studies show that two-thirds of oral cancers occur in the mouth and one-third in the oropharynx.

Oral cancer can spread quickly. On average, only half of those diagnosed with the disease will survive more than five years.



The oral cavity  
 (Source: The National Cancer Institute)

### Signs and Symptoms:

*See a dentist or physician if any of the following symptoms last more than two weeks:*

- A sore on the lip or the mouth that does not heal
- A lump on the lip, mouth, or throat
- White or red patch on the gums, tongue, or lining of the mouth
- Unusual bleeding, pain, or numbness in the mouth
- Sore throat that doesn't go away, or a feeling that something is caught in the throat
- Difficulty swallowing or pain with chewing
- Swelling of the jaw that causes dentures to become uncomfortable or fit poorly
- Change in the voice
- Pain in the ear

### How to Lower Your Risk:

Most oral cancer is preventable. Seventy-five percent of oral cancers are related to tobacco use, alcohol use, or the use of both substances together. Using both tobacco and alcohol puts you at a higher risk than using either substance alone.

- **Do not use tobacco products — cigarettes, chew or snuff, pipes, or cigars.** Tobacco in *all forms* increases your chance of having oral cancer.
- **If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation.** Excessive alcohol use increases your risk of oral cancer.
- **Use lip balm that contains sunscreen.** Exposure to sunlight is a risk factor for lip cancer.
- **Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.** Eating lots of fruits and vegetables as part of a low-fat, high-fiber diet may help reduce cancer risk. The National Cancer Institute suggests eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

## The Oral Cancer Exam:

An oral cancer exam is painless and quick — it takes only a few minutes. A dental checkup is a good time to have the exam.

A typical exam may include some or all of the following:

1. If you have dentures (plates) or partials, you will be asked to remove them.
2. The dental professional (dentist or dental hygienist) will inspect your face, neck, lips, and mouth.
3. With both hands, he or she will feel the area under your jaw and the side of your neck, checking for lumps.
4. He or she will look at and feel the insides of your lips and cheeks to check for red and/or white patches.
5. Next, the dental professional will have you stick out your tongue to check for swelling or abnormal color or texture.
6. Using gauze, he or she will gently pull your tongue to one side, then the other, to check the back of your tongue. The underside of your tongue will also be checked.
7. The dental professional will look at the roof and floor of your mouth and the back of your throat.
8. Finally, your dentist or dental hygienist will put one finger on the floor of your mouth and, with the other hand under your chin, gently press down to check for lumps or sensitivity.

### THE DANGERS of DIP and CHEW



Using snuff or chewing tobacco puts people at a higher risk of developing oral cancer. In fact, it increases the risk by about 50 times. Chew or snuff is most commonly used by young adults ages 18 to 25. A recent survey reported that an estimated 7.6 million Americans age 12 and older had used smokeless tobacco in the last month.

#### Additional Harmful Effects of Dipping:

- Sugar in spit tobacco may cause tooth decay in exposed roots.
- Dip and chew can cause your gums to pull away from the teeth in the place where the tobacco is held. The gums do not grow back.
- Leathery white patches, called leukoplakia (loo-kō-plāy-kēa), and red sores are common in dippers and chewers and can turn into cancer.

For more information on health issues in Kentucky, please log on to:

[www.ca.uky.edu/HEEL](http://www.ca.uky.edu/HEEL)

#### Sources:

- <http://cancer.gov/cancerinfo/wyntk/oral#5>
- [http://cis.nci.nih.gov/fact/3\\_63.htm](http://cis.nci.nih.gov/fact/3_63.htm)
- [http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/CRI\\_2x.asp?sitearea=&dt=60](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/CRI_2x.asp?sitearea=&dt=60)
- <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/health/newsandhealth/oralcancerexam.pdf>
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