

Oral Cancer

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Key points:

- Introduction
- Threat factors
- Symptoms
- Treatment
- Conclusion

Introduction

Oral cancer, a subtype of head and neck cancers, denotes to malignant growths found in the mouth, lips, tongue, cheeks, floor of the mouth, hard and soft palate, sinuses, and throat. It typically begins in the squamous cells that line the oral cavity. Globally, oral cancer is a major public health concern, particularly in regions where tobacco, alcohol, and betel nut usage are prevalent. Early discovery significantly recovers survival rates, but due to late diagnosis in many cases, the brevity rate remains high.¹

Threat Factors

Numerous risk factors contribute to the development of oral cancer. The most prominent include:

- Tobacco use: Smoking cigarettes, cigars, pipes, or using smokeless tobacco products like chewing tobacco or snuff is one of the strongest risk factors for oral cancer .²
- Alcohol consumption: Heavy alcohol use, particularly when combined with tobacco, significantly increases the risk .⁴
- Human papillomavirus (HPV): Especially HPV-16, this sexually transmitted virus has

been increasingly associated with oropharyngeal cancers. ³

- Sun exposure: Long exposure to sunlight is linked to lip cancers, mainly among outdoor workers.⁵
- Dietary deficiencies: Lack of fruits and vegetables, which are rich in antioxidants, may increase vulnerability to oral malignancies. ²
- Genetic predisposition and weakened immune systems are also contributing factors. ⁹

Symptoms

Oral cancer may present a variety of signs, many of which are often mistaken for less serious conditions. Key symptoms include:

- Tenacious mouth sores that do not heal
- White or red patches inside the mouth or on the tongue
- Lumps or thickening in the cheek or mouth lining
- Difficulty chewing, swallowing, or speaking
- Chronic sore throat or hoarseness
- Numbness or pain in the mouth or lips.⁸

Early detection is crucial, as many symptoms appear in the initial stages and can be addressed promptly if diagnosed correctly.⁶

screenings, and lifestyle alterations are key elements in the global fight alongside oral cancer.^{1,10}



Figure 1: Oral Cancer Screening.¹⁰

Treatment strategies for oral cancer depend on the stage and location of the tumor and the patient's overall health. Common treatments include:

- Surgery: To remove tumors and affected lymph nodes.
- Radiation therapy: Often used post-surgery or for patients who are not candidates for surgery.
- Chemotherapy: May be used alongside radiation or for advanced-stage cancer.
- Targeted drug therapy: Agents like cetuximab target specific aspects of cancer cells.⁷
- Immunotherapy: A newer treatment method that enhances the body's immune response against cancer cells.
- Reconstructive surgery and speech therapy may be necessary for restoring functions after treatment.⁹

Conclusion

Oral cancer remains a critical health challenge worldwide. While it is largely unnecessary through behavioral changes such as quitting tobacco, reducing alcohol intake, and maintaining oral hygiene, awareness and early detection are essential to improve patient outcomes. Education, regular

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