

FACTS ABOUT ORAL CANCER

Incidence and Mortality

- Oral cancer strikes an estimated 34,360 Americans each year. An estimated 7,550 people (5,180 men and 2,370 women) – about 22% will die of these cancers in 2007.¹
- More than 25% of the 30,000 Americans who get oral cancer will die of the disease.²
- Oral cancer is as common as leukemia and claims more lives than either melanoma or cervical cancer.³
- On average, only half of those diagnosed with the disease will survive more than five years.⁴
- African-Americans are especially vulnerable; the incidence rate is 1/3 higher than whites and the mortality rate is almost twice as high.⁵

Risk Factors

- Although the use of tobacco and alcohol are risk factors in developing oral cancer, approximately 25% of oral cancer patients have no known risk factors.^{6, 7}
- There has been a nearly five-fold increase in incidence in oral cancer patients under age 40, many with no known risk factors.^{8, 9, 10, 11}
- The incidence of oral cancer in women has increased significantly. Largely due to increase in women smoking. In 1950 the male to female ratio was 6:1; by 2002, it was 2:1.

Prevention and Detection

- The best way to prevent oral cancer is to avoid tobacco and alcohol use.
 - Regular dental check-ups, including an examination of the entire mouth, are essential in the early detection of cancerous and pre-cancerous conditions.
 - Many types of abnormal cells can develop in the oral cavity in the form of red or white spots. Some are harmless benign, some are cancerous, and others are pre-cancerous, meaning they can develop into cancer if not detected early and removed. (ACS)
 - Finding and removing epithelial dysplasias before they become cancer can be one of the most effective methods for reducing the incidence and mortality of cancer.
 - Knowing the risk factors and seeing your dentist for oral cancer screenings can help prevent this deadly disease. Routine use of the Pap smear since 1955, for example, dramatically reduced the incidence and mortality rates for cervical cancer in the United States.¹² Similarly,
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use of colonoscopy now makes it possible to detect dysplastic polyps years before they can turn into colon cancer and is contributing to falling rates of mortality for the disease.¹³

- Oral cancer is often preceded by the presence of clinically identifiable premalignant changes. These lesions may present as either white or red patches or spots. Identifying white and red spots that show dysplasia and removing them before they become cancer is an effective method for reducing the incidence and mortality of cancer.

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 2. National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health, website 2007
 3. American Cancer Society web page
 4. National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health, website 2007
 5. American Cancer Society, Facts and Figures for African-Americans
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 11. Dahlstrom, K. R et al. Squamous cell carcinoma of the head and neck in never smoker-never drinkers: A descriptive epidemiologic study. *Head Neck* 2007.
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 13. Neville BW and Day TA. Oral cancer and precancerous lesions. *CA Cancer J Clin* 2002; 52:195-215
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