

# Oral Cancer



## SENIOR DENTAL CARE

Oral cancer affects the mouth (including the lips, tongue, roof and floor of the mouth) and cheeks. Cancer begins when cells, the building blocks of the body, become damaged and grow abnormally. Each year, about 800 New Yorkers are diagnosed with oral or throat cancer, and 190 die. Seventy percent of oral and throat tumors with a known stage were diagnosed late.

### Who is at risk?

Anyone can develop oral cancer, but some people are at an increased risk.

#### Seniors (age 60 and over)

- The risk of developing oral cancer increases as a person ages.

#### Men

- Oral cancer occurs twice as often in men as in women.

#### Tobacco and Alcohol Use

- **Most oral cancers are caused by tobacco use.** People with a history of smoking cigarettes, cigars and pipes, or using smokeless tobacco, such as chewing tobacco, are at a higher risk.
- People who drink or have a history drinking large amounts of alcohol are at a higher risk.
- If a person is a heavy drinker **and** tobacco user, his or her risk is especially high.

#### Sunlight

- Spending a lot of time outdoors and in the sun over several years can cause lip cancer.

White patches in the mouth are an early sign of oral cancer.



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### What does oral cancer look like?

Oral cancer can appear differently depending on the person and the location in the mouth.

Although most changes in the mouth or on the lips are not caused by cancer, visit your dentist for an oral cancer screening if you notice any of the following:

- White patches that cannot be removed with a washcloth
- Brightly colored red patches that do not heal after two weeks
- A sore that does not heal after two weeks
- Difficulty or pain when swallowing
- Difficulty wearing dentures
- Lumps in the neck
- Earache that doesn't go away
- Numbness of the lower lip and chin
- Persistent cough or hoarseness

### How to reduce your risk:

- 1. Quit tobacco.** The best way to decrease your chance of developing oral cancer is to stop smoking or using any smokeless tobacco products. There are several treatments available to help. Ask your dentist, doctor or case worker for more information about quitting, or call New York State Smokers' Quitline (Dial 1-866-NY-QUITS or 1-866-697-8487).
- 2. Use sunscreen.** Using a lotion or lip balm that has sunscreen can reduce the chance of developing cancer of the lip. Wearing a hat with a brim can also help protect the lips from the sun.
- 3. Visit your dentist regularly (at least once a year), even if you don't have natural teeth.** During your appointment, the dentist will check your mouth for signs of oral cancer. If you notice any unusual changes in your lips or mouth between visits, see your dentist or doctor as soon as possible.

**Contact your dentist or medical provider promptly if you are in pain or need care.**

