

“Oral Cancer Screening Saves Lives”

And this simple exam is quick and painless

It's called mouth cancer, tongue cancer, lip cancer or oral cancer – and this year alone, approximately 36,000 Americans will be diagnosed with it.

That works out to about 100 new cases a day. What's more, unlike many other forms of cancer, oral cancer is actually becoming more common. In fact this year is the fourth year in a row there's been an increase in the rate of occurrence.

So what can you do to protect yourself?

Get the Facts

A good first step is to know the risk factors for oral cancer. The biggest include:

- **Using tobacco or alcohol – particularly in combination**
- **Exposure to human papilloma virus version 16 (the same virus implicated in cervical cancer)**
- **Too much time in the sun and a family history of cancer**

At the same time, it's important to remember that anyone can get oral cancer. In fact more than 25% of people with oral cancer don't smoke or use alcohol to excess.

Know the Odds

When oral cancer is diagnosed early the prognosis is hopeful – with a survival rate of between 80 and 90%. But when it isn't found until it's reached its later stages it's far harder to treat – with the result that the overall 5 year survival rate is just 45%.

While oral cancer is usually treated by some combination of surgery, radiation and chemotherapy, the mix varies depending on the individual and how promptly the cancer was diagnosed.

- When oral cancer is found early it can usually be treated effectively without changing a person's appearance or ability to function.
- When it's discovered later, treatment can cause considerable disfigurement and make it hard for patients to chew, swallow or speak clearly.

Clearly early detection is key – but it isn't easy, because signs and symptoms of oral cancer are hard to see and can look very much like other conditions.



Take Action

There ARE things you can do to protect yourself, though. For example:

Experts recommend you do a self exam at least once a month – making sure to look carefully at your lips, tongue, gums, cheeks and the rest of your mouth and feeling for lumps on your neck and lower jaw.

Plus, because it can be so hard to find signs of oral cancer yourself, the **American Cancer Society also recommends you have your dentist do a cancer screening** every three years if you're over 20 and every year if you're over 40.

We Can Help

As a dentist I'm well aware of the danger of oral cancer. So at our office we consider a thorough cancer screening a normal part of your regular exam. We have the equipment to carefully examine your mouth, tongue, neck and jaw – and the skill to tell the difference between a symptom that's harmless and one that could be a warning sign of cancer.

Your entire oral cancer screening takes just a few minutes, and it's totally painless. In fact it's so easy, you may not have realized what a truly lifesaving procedure it can be.

Which brings me to one last thought. If you know someone who hasn't been to the dentist in a while, please urge them to make an appointment for an exam that includes a cancer screening. It just might be the most important thing you do today.

Sources: ADA.org, myclevelandclinic.org, oralcancerfoundation.org

Dr. Tarpinning is a dentist at Hebert Dental in Eau Claire, Wisconsin and has authored a book entitled "Get Your Smile On! Your Guide To Extraordinary Dental Care" in 2013.

For more information you can reach him at 715-835-0606 or by e-mail at info@hebertdental.com

