

Oral Cancer

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Key points

- Oral cancer affects mouth, lips and throat
- Sorethroat, painful swallowing, oral ulcers and numbness
- Physical examination and biopsy
- Chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery

Oral cancer, also known as mouth cancer, is a type of cancer that affects the mouth, lips or throat. It is the sixth most common cancer worldwide, with an estimated 450,000 new cases diagnosed each year. Oral cancer is a serious condition that can be life threatening if not detected and treated early. The aim of this article is to provide an overview of the risk factors, symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of oral cancer.

Causes of oral cancer

The exact causes of oral cancer are still unknown. However, it is believed that certain factors can increase the risk of developing this type of cancer. These factors include:

1. Tobacco use: Smoking or chewing tobacco products can significantly increase the risk of oral cancer.
2. Alcohol consumption: Heavy alcohol consumption can also increase the risk of developing oral cancer.
3. HPV infection: Infection with human papillomavirus (HPV) is a risk factor for oral cancer.
4. Sun exposure: Prolonged exposure to sunlight can increase the risk of lip cancer.
5. Poor oral hygiene: Poor oral hygiene can lead to the development of oral cancer.
6. Genetic factors: A family history of oral cancer can increase the risk of developing the condition.

Symptoms

The symptoms of oral cancer can vary depending on the location and stage of the cancer. Some common symptoms include:

1. Persistent sore throat or hoarseness
2. Pain or difficulty when swallowing
3. Lump or thickening in the mouth or throat

4. White or red patches on the gums, tongue, or lining of the mouth
5. Bleeding from the mouth
6. Difficulty moving the tongue or jaw
7. Numbness or tingling in the mouth or tongue
8. Ear pain

Diagnosis

To diagnose oral cancer, a dentist or doctor performs a physical examination of the mouth and throat. They may also use specialized tests and procedures, such as:

1. Biopsy: A small piece of tissue is removed from the affected area and examined under a microscope to determine if cancer is present.
2. X-ray: An X-ray can help identify any tumours or abnormalities in the mouth or throat.
3. Endoscopy: A small, flexible tube with a camera on the end is inserted into the mouth or throat to examine the area in detail.
4. MRI or CT scan: These imaging tests can help determine the size and location of the cancer.

Prevention of oral cancer

There are several things you can do to reduce your risk of developing oral cancer, including:

1. Avoiding tobacco products: Smoking and chewing tobacco increase the risk of oral cancer.
2. Limiting alcohol consumption: Heavy alcohol consumption increases the risk of oral cancer.
3. Protecting your lips from the sun: Use lip balm with an SPF of at least 15 and wear a hat to protect your face from the sun.
4. Practicing good oral hygiene: Brush and floss your

teeth regularly and visit your dentist for regular check-ups.

5. Getting vaccinated: The HPV vaccine can reduce the risk of oral cancer caused by HPV infection.
Conclusion

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Oral cancer is a serious condition that can be life-threatening if not detected and treated timely. Risk factors for oral cancer include tobacco use, heavy alcohol consumption, HPV infection, a weakened immune system, and a family history of oral cancer. Symptoms may include a persistent sore throat, difficulty swallowing, and unexplained weight loss. Diagnosis involves a physical examination, imaging tests, and a biopsy. Treatment options may include surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, targeted therapy, or immunotherapy. Regular dental check-ups and oral cancer screenings can help detect oral cancer in its early stages, when it is most treatable.

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