



Q What is mouth cancer?

Most people have heard of cancer affecting parts of the body such as the lungs or breasts. However, cancer can occur in the mouth, where the disease can affect the lips, tongue, cheeks and throat.

Q Who can be affected by mouth cancer?

Anyone can be affected by mouth cancer, whether they have their own teeth or not. Mouth cancers are more common in people over 40, particularly men. However, research has shown that mouth cancer is becoming more common in younger patients and in women. There are, on average, almost 6,000 new cases of mouth cancer diagnosed in the UK each year. The number of new cases of mouth cancer is on the increase.

Q Do people die from mouth cancer?

Yes. Over 1,800 people in the UK die from mouth cancer every year. Many of these deaths could be prevented if the cancer was caught early enough. As it is, people with mouth cancer are more likely to die than those having cervical cancer or melanoma skin cancer.

Q What can cause mouth cancer?

Most cases of mouth cancer are linked to tobacco and alcohol. Cigarette, cigar and pipe smoking are the main forms of tobacco use in the UK. However, the traditional ethnic habits of chewing tobacco, betel quid, gutkha and paan are particularly dangerous.

Alcohol increases the risk of mouth cancer, and if tobacco and alcohol are consumed together the risk is even greater. Over-exposure to sunlight can also increase the risk of cancer of the lips.

Many recent reports have linked mouth cancer to the human papilloma virus (HPV). HPV is the major cause of cervical cancer and affects the skin that lines the moist areas of the body.

HPV can be spread through oral sex, and research now suggests that it could soon rival smoking and drinking as one of the main causes of mouth cancer.

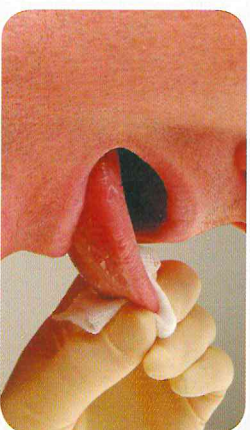
Practicing safe sex and limiting the number of partners you have may help reduce your chances of contracting HPV.

Q What are the signs of mouth cancer?

Mouth cancer can appear in different forms and can affect all parts of the mouth, tongue and lips. Mouth cancer can appear as a painless mouth ulcer that does not heal normally. A white or red patch in the mouth can also develop into a cancer. It is important to visit your dentist if these areas do not heal within three weeks.

Q How can mouth cancer be detected early?

Mouth cancer can often be spotted in its early stages by your dentist during a thorough mouth examination. If mouth cancer is recognised early, then the chances of a cure are good. Many people with mouth cancer go to their dentist or doctor too late.



Your dentist can check for mouth cancer

Q What is involved in a full check-up of the mouth?

The dentist examines the inside of your mouth and your tongue with the help of a small mirror. Remember, your dentist is able to see parts of your mouth that you cannot see easily yourself.

Q What happens if my dentist finds a problem?

If your dentist finds something unusual or abnormal they will refer you to a consultant at the local hospital, who will carry out a thorough examination of your mouth and throat. A small sample of the cells may be gathered from the area (a biopsy), and these cells will be examined under the microscope to see what is wrong.

Q What happens next?

If the cells are cancerous, more tests will be carried out. These may include overall health checks, blood tests, x-rays or scans. These tests will decide what course of treatment is needed.

Q Can mouth cancer be cured?

If mouth cancer is spotted early, the chances of a complete cure are good, and the smaller the area or ulcer the better the chance of a cure. However, too many people come forward too late, because they do not visit their dentist for regular examinations.

Q How can I make sure that my mouth stays healthy?

- It is important to visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend, even if you wear dentures. This is especially important if you smoke and drink alcohol.
- When brushing your teeth, look out for any changes in your mouth, and report any red or white patches, or ulcers, that have not cleared up within three weeks.
- When exposed to the sun, be sure to use a good protective sun cream, and put the correct type of barrier cream on your lips.

- A good diet, rich in vitamins A, C and E, provides protection against the development of mouth cancer. Plenty of fruit and vegetables help the body to protect itself, in general, from most cancers.
- Cut down on your smoking and drinking.

Regular visits to your dentist could save your life.



● Smoking and drinking put you more at risk



British
Dental Health
Foundation

The British Dental Health Foundation is an independent, UK-based charity dedicated to promoting the benefits of good oral health to the public throughout the world.


The Foundation promotes three key messages:

- brush your teeth for two minutes twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- cut down on how often you have sugary foods and drinks.
- visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend.

Look for our 'Approved' symbol on oral health products. You can trust these products to live up to the claims on their packaging.



The Dental Helpline is the Foundation's own confidential advice service. Qualified dental professionals are available to answer your questions personally from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Or you can send us a question by email from our website at any time.

 **Dental
Helpline**
0845 063 1188
www.dentalhealth.org

It costs the Foundation £9 for every enquiry we answer. If you would like to make a donation, please send a cheque to the address below, or phone 01788 539793 to donate by credit or debit card.

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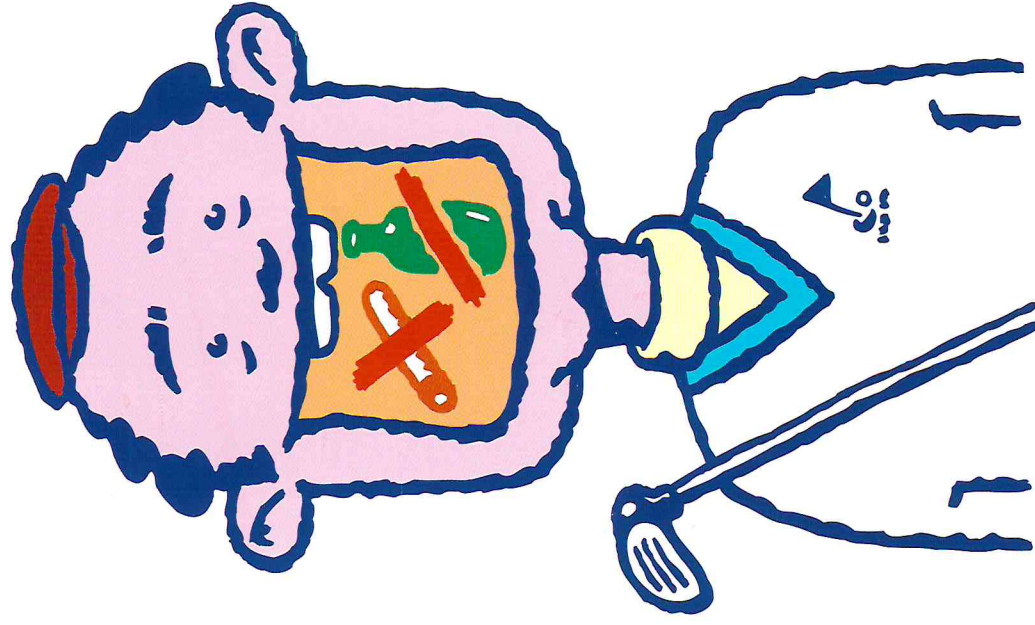
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Tell me about

Mouth cancer



Q Am I certain to lose my teeth?

No. If you look after your teeth, and have help from your dentist and hygienist, you will be able to keep your teeth for life. Gum disease and tooth decay can be prevented whatever your age.

Q What particular problems may older people have?

Your gums may recede (shrink back) as you get older, and your teeth may become a little more sensitive as a result. Your dentist or hygienist will be able to show you the best way to brush to keep any gum problems under control. They may also suggest a mouthwash to deal with the sensitivity.

You may find it harder to clean your teeth if you have problems moving your hands or arms, or if your eyesight is less than perfect. Again, you can get help and advice on the best aids to use. A magnifying mirror and a good light are often helpful.

If you have lost some teeth, and have bridges or dentures, you may have particular cleaning needs and problems. Your dentist or hygienist can help you with these.

Some people take medication which makes their mouth dry. Saliva helps to protect your teeth against decay, so if you have less saliva than usual ask your dentist for advice. Or you can get special products, including artificial saliva, over the counter in most chemists.

Q Should I expect to have problems with my gums?

Gum problems are caused by a build-up of bacteria called 'plaque', which forms constantly on your teeth and gums. It is important to remove this plaque to avoid gum inflammation. If the plaque is not removed, the gum inflammation will, in time, affect the bone under the gums. This bone supports the tooth roots, so your teeth may gradually become loose.

Q How do I know if I have gum disease?

Many people may not know they have gum disease, because it is often painless. Some common signs are:

- gums that bleed when brushed
- loose teeth
- receding gums
- bad breath

Not everyone has all these signs. You may have only one.

Q Can I still get tooth decay?

Yes. The same plaque which causes gum inflammation can cause decay, especially when combined with sugary foods and drinks. There is a particular risk of decay when the gum has receded, as the 'neck' of the tooth is not protected by enamel.

Q How can I prevent gum disease and tooth decay?

Thoroughly remove plaque from your teeth (and dentures, if you have them) at least twice a day:

- Use a toothpaste containing 1350 to 1500ppm (parts per million) of fluoride. There are also many special types of toothpaste on the market, including tartar-control and total-care toothpastes. Your dentist may prescribe a higher-fluoride toothpaste if they think you need it.
- Clean in between your teeth every day with 'interdental' brushes or floss – if you just brush, this cleans no more than about 60 percent of the surface of your teeth.
- Cut down on how often you have food and drinks containing sugar.
- Visit your dentist and hygienist regularly, as often as they recommend.

Q What do I need to clean my teeth properly?

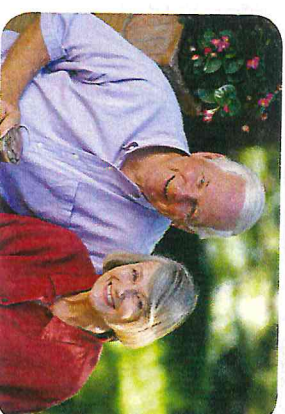
You need a small-headed, medium-textured toothbrush and a fluoride toothpaste. To help clean between your teeth you can use an 'interdental brush', tape, or floss. If you have arthritis you may find it hard to grip a toothbrush handle, but you can get handle adapters.

Electric toothbrushes are also ideal for people with limited movement. The handles are thicker and easier to hold, and the head does most of the work. There are many products to choose from, and your dentist or hygienist can help you decide which are best for you.

Q How do I know if I have removed all the plaque?

Plaque can be stained with food dye painted onto your teeth with a cotton bud, or with special 'disclosing tablets' you can get from the dentist.

This stain is harmless and will show any areas of your mouth which need cleaning more carefully. Look particularly where the teeth and gums meet. Brushing again will remove the stained plaque.



It is possible to keep your teeth for life





What if I have missing teeth?

There are three main ways to replace the missing teeth. The first is with a removable false tooth or teeth – a partial or full denture. The second is with a fixed bridge. A bridge is usually used when there are fewer teeth to replace, or when the missing teeth are only on one side of the mouth.



The third way is a dental implant. This is a titanium metal rod which is placed into the jawbone. It is used to support one or more false teeth. Usually, both the false teeth and their supporting rod are called an 'implant'.



What causes mouth ulcers?

Ulcers can be caused by broken teeth, poorly fitting dentures or sharp pieces of food. Once the cause is removed, ulcers should heal within 3 weeks. If you notice an ulcer which does not heal, see your dentist promptly. Many serious conditions, such as mouth cancer, can be treated better if they are diagnosed early at a routine check-up.



What if somebody is housebound?

Contact your local Dentist to see if they will make home visits.



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 **Dental Helpline**
0845 063 1188
www.dentalhelpline.org

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Tell me about

Dental care for older people

