



METROPOLITAN DENVER  
DENTAL SOCIETY

YOUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS IN ORAL HEALTH

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# Oral Cancer

## FACTS

Every hour one American dies of oral cancer

Oral cancer is the sixth most common cancer, accounting for 3.6% of all cancers diagnosed

Oral Cancer kills more people nationwide than either cervical cancer or melanoma

Currently, only half of all patients diagnosed with oral cancer live more than 5 years

An estimated 30,200 new oral cancer cases will be diagnosed this year

Although the percentage of deaths has been decreasing since 1980, nearly 8,000 Americans die annually from oral cancer

Smoking in combination with heavy alcohol consumption (30+ drinks/week) is the primary risk factor for oral cancer, however more than 25% percent of oral cancer victims fall outside of this category

Oral cancer is more likely to strike after the age of 40, particularly in men, who get oral cancer twice as often as women

Additional risk factors that may be linked to oral cancer include: smokeless tobacco use; regular, prolonged exposure to the sun (lip cancer)

Studies suggest that a diet high in fruits and vegetables may prevent the development of potentially cancerous lesions

Oral cancer can affect any area of the oral cavity including the lips, gum tissues, cheek lining, tongue, and the hard or soft palate.

Oral Cancer often starts as a tiny, unnoticed white or red spot or sore anywhere in the mouth.

### Symptoms of oral cancer include:

...a sore that bleeds easily or does not heal...a lump, thickening, rough spot, crust or small eroded area...a color change of the oral tissues...pain, tenderness, or numbness anywhere in the mouth or on the lips...a change in the way the teeth fit together...difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking, or moving the jaw or tongue

## What can a patient expect during an oral exam?

In about 10% of patients, a dentist may notice a flat, painless, white or red spot or sore. Some spots are harmless, some are not. To ensure that a spot is not dangerous, your dentist may perform a simple test, such as a brush biopsy, a **painless test** that can determine potentially dangerous cells when the disease is in its early stages. This test enables the biopsy to be performed in the office and is nothing more than brushing the suspicious area and sending the sample to a lab for examination. If your dentist notices something that looks very suspicious, a scalpel biopsy maybe recommended. This usually requires local anesthesia.

## How is oral cancer treated?

If a growth is malignant, oral cancer may be treated in one or a combination of the following ways:

### Surgery:

removal of cancerous tissue by an oral surgeon

### Radiation therapy:

treatment involves radiation, such as gamma or beta rays

### Chemotherapy:

treatment involves the use of drugs

## Can oral cancer be prevented?

Good oral hygiene can prevent oral cancer. Regular visits to the dentist can increase the chance of early detection, which can improve the potential for successful treatment. Have your mouth checked regularly for skin lesions and abrasions.