



## Ways to self assess mouth cancer

**Whether you are looking for answers for yourself or someone you love, we are here to give you the best information available.**

Oral cancer, also known as mouth cancer, forms in the oral cavity, which includes all parts of your mouth that you can see. If you open your mouth wide and look in the mirror, you will see your lips, gums, tongue, cheeks, roof, and floor of the mouth.

Oral cancer forms when the cells on the lips or in the mouth mutate. Most often, they begin in the flat thin cells that line your lips and the inside of your mouth. Small changes to the DNA of these cells make the cells grow abnormally. Then these mutated cells accumulate, forming a tumor that grows in the mouth and often spreads to the lymph nodes in the neck.

**Important note:** Oral cancer is curable if detected at an early stage. The detection of small, early-stage oral cancer has been shown to lead to significantly reduced deaths and suffering

### Who gets oral cancer?

The average age of those diagnosed with oral cancer is around 63. Just over 20 percent of cases occur in patients younger than 55. However, it can affect anyone.

There are several known risk factors that could increase your risk of developing oral cancer. If you use any kind of tobacco, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes, chewing tobacco, and others, you are at greater risk. Heavy alcohol use and those with HPV are at increased risk of getting oral or mouth cancer.



## What are the ways to self assess oral or mouth cancer?

You can perform an oral cancer risk assessment by following the steps given below:

- **Face** - Examine the symmetry of the face in a mirror, and check for irregularities and new imbalance between the two sides.
- **Lips** - Pull up upper and lower lips to check the texture and color.
- **Gums** - Raise upper and lower lips to check color and conditions of the gums.
- **Cheeks** - Draw back the side of the mouth to check inside the cheeks.
- **Tongue and floor of mouth** - Move the tongue, check as far back as can be seen in the mirror, and feel the area.
- **Neck** - Feel for anything unusual on the sides of the neck.
- **Trachea** - Hold the thyroid cartilage (the Adam's apple). It should go up and down when you swallow.

## How early do I see my doctor, and what are the red flags?

Oral cancer can present itself in many different ways. This can include - a lip or mouth sore that doesn't heal, a white or reddish patch on the inside of your mouth, loose teeth, a growth or lump inside of your mouth, mouth pain, ear pain, and difficulty or pain while swallowing, opening your mouth, or chewing.

If you are experiencing any of these issues and they persist for more than 2 weeks, visit your doctor. Your doctor will be able to rule out the most common

causes first, like an infection.

### **Prevention of Oral Cancer:**

- Quit smoking or the consumption of any form of tobacco
- Quit betel quid/areca/gutkha/chewing tobacco consumption
- Also discourage children and young adults from experimenting with harmful lifestyle habits
- Eat plenty of fresh fruits and green-yellow vegetables daily.

### **Note:**

Remember, improving awareness among the general public, including primary care practitioners, dispensing screening or early diagnostic facilities for people, especially for tobacco and alcohol users, and providing adequate treatment for those diagnosed with cancer are critical.

- Dr. Prashanth R Reddy

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