

## Causes of Oral Cancer

We don't know what causes most mouth cancers. In the past the risk of developing mouth cancer increased with age, however, there is a recent rise in oral cancer in younger people and women. There are several factors that are likely to increase your risk.

**Around 90% of mouth cancers can be linked to preventable lifestyle factors such as smoking and excessive alcohol consumption.** The below causes are linked to mouth cancer but this does not mean that you are certain to develop mouth cancer.

### Smoking

Smoking tobacco increases your risk of developing mouth cancer by up to ten times, compared with never-smokers. This includes smoking cigarettes, pipes or cigars. Around two in every three (more than 60%) mouth cancers are linked to smoking. There is also evidence that second-hand smoke at home or in the workplace may increase a person's risk of mouth cancer.

### Alcohol

Drinking alcohol to excess increases your risk of mouth cancer. Alcohol is linked to just under a third (30%) of all mouth cancers. Smoking and drinking together increases the risk of mouth cancer by up to 30 times. UK guidelines recommend a maximum of 14 units of alcohol a week for both men and women.

### HPV

Many recent reports have linked mouth cancer to the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is the major cause of cervical cancer and affects the skin that lines the moist areas of the body. There are now HPV vaccines for both girls and boys. They were developed to fight cervical cancer, but it is likely that they will also help to reduce the rates of mouth cancer. These vaccines are given at age 12 to 13 before sexual activity starts.

### Diet

Around a third of mouth cancers are thought to be linked to an unhealthy diet and a lack of vitamins and minerals. It is recommended that you eat a healthy, balanced diet including lots of fruit and vegetables each day. Increasing evidence also suggests that Omega 3, found in foods such as eggs and fish, can help lower your risk. Foods high in fibre such as nuts, seeds, whole-wheat pasta and brown rice, are also said to do the same.

### Sunlight and sunbeds

Too much ultraviolet (UV) radiation is a known cause of skin cancer. This can occur either from natural sunlight or sunbeds. Skin cancer can develop on the lips – as this area is often exposed to UV radiation.

#### In summary

- 1) **Do not smoke**
- 2) **Limit alcohol to 14 units per week**
- 3) **Eat a healthy well-balanced diet rich in vitamins and Omega 3 fatty acids**
- 4) **Avoid exposure to sunlight without sunscreen or appropriate clothing**

**For more expert advice on looking after your teeth please visit our website.**

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