

Oral Cancer: Prevention



How can oral cancer be prevented?

The best way to protect yourself from oral cancer is to know what makes you more likely to get it. These are called risk factors. You can't change some risk factors, but others you can.

The primary risk factors for oral cancer are:

- Using tobacco in any form
- Drinking alcohol in large amounts over a long period of time

The risk for oral cancer is even higher in people who use both tobacco and alcohol.

Other risk factors include:

- HPV infection
- Sun exposure (ultraviolet radiation), which can cause lip cancer

Making lifestyle changes

To help prevent oral cancer:

- Don't use any form or type of tobacco. Talk with your healthcare provider for resources to help you quit.
- Stay away from other people's smoke (secondhand smoke).
- Limit how much alcohol you drink or don't drink at all.

Other lifestyle changes that can help prevent oral cancer include:

- **Protect yourself from UV light exposure.** People who spend a lot of time in the sun have a greater risk for lip cancer. If possible, limit time spent in the sun. If you are in the sun, wear a wide-brimmed hat and protect your lips with sunscreen or lip balm with an SPF of 30.
- **Prevent HPV infection.** Limit your risk for oral human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. The risk for HPV is higher in people who have oral sex and multiple sex partners. The HPV vaccine lowers the risk for HPV infections. Over time, it also should lower the risk for oral cancers linked to HPV. Ask your healthcare provider about getting the HPV vaccine.
- **Eat well.** People with poor diets have a greater risk for these cancers. It's important to eat a healthy diet focused on plant-based foods. Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Limit processed foods, sugary drinks, and red meats.
- **Stay at a healthy weight.** Extra weight is linked to oral cancer. Ask your healthcare provider what a healthy weight is for you. They can help you reach your goal weight.
- **Have your dentures correctly fitted.** Dentures that rub the inside of the cheeks or the tongue can cause irritation that changes the cells of the mouth. This may lead to an increased risk for cancer over time. All denture wearers should remove and clean their dentures every night and have them regularly checked by a dentist. Everyone should get regular dental care.

Talk with your healthcare provider

If you're at risk for oral cancer, your healthcare provider can suggest resources to help. Making changes can be hard, but you don't have to make them alone. Your provider can help you find a counselor or self-help group in your area. You'll connect with other people who have been able to make these changes. Ask them for ideas about what worked for them.

Your healthcare provider can also check your mouth for oral cancer. This can help find oral cancer in its early stages, when it's small and easiest to treat.

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