

MOUTH CANCER

Q Can cancer of the mouth kill?

A Yes. Mouth cancer causes literally thousands of deaths each year. What's more, the number of people who get cancer in the mouth is increasing.

Cancer can affect all parts of the body. Most people have heard about lung cancer, breast cancer and bone cancer, but you may be surprised to know that in this country nearly 2000 people die from cancer of the mouth each year. This figure is rising, probably because people are drinking and smoking more.

The mouth is simple to check so it is easy to find the cancer early and have it treated and cured. The main problem is that people don't visit their dentist for a regular check-up. This leaflet will give you some advice on how you can help yourself and your family to keep a healthy mouth.

Q What is mouth cancer?

A Mouth cancer appears in different forms. It can affect all parts of the mouth, whether people have their own teeth or not. Sometimes a white or red patch in the mouth or on the tongue may develop into cancer. However, most often cancer appears as a painless ulcer that does not clear up. If any ulcer in your mouth has not healed after two weeks you should see a dentist immediately.

Q Can it be cured?

A If mouth cancer is spotted early, the chances of a complete cure are very good. The smaller the ulcer, the better the chances of a cure. Unfortunately too many people come forward too late.

Q What if I have dentures?

A You should still see your dentist every year or as often as your dentist recommends. A dental check-up does not just cover teeth, but the cheeks, tongue and gums.

Q Will it hurt to have my mouth checked?

A No. The examination is carried out using a light, mirrors and gentle touching with fingers.

Q Does anything make mouth cancer more likely?

A Mouth cancer can affect anyone, but smoking greatly increases your risk. Heavy drinking is also a risk. If you do both, your chances of getting it are greater.

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

A See your dentist at least once a year for a check-up. This is especially important if you smoke and drink – even more so if you are over 40 years old.

If you see a white or red patch, or have a painless ulcer in your mouth, see your dentist right away.