

Oral Cancer – What You Need to Know

According to the [Oral Cancer Foundation](#), 35,000 Americans will be diagnosed with Oral Cancers each year, and only half of them will survive longer than five years. Early detection is key to effective treatment. Here is some information about oral cancers and what you can expect from an oral cancer screening from your dentist.

About Oral Cancer

Cancers result from changes in genes which control cell behaviors. Cancer occurs when cells become abnormal and divide without control or order. Oral cancer is most common in people over the age of 45, but can develop at any age. Symptoms that could possibly indicate oral cancer are:

- Sore on the lip or in the mouth that won't heal
- Lump on lip or in the mouth or throat
- A white or red patch on the gums, tongue, or mouth lining
- Unusual bleeding, pain, or numbness in the mouth
- A sore throat that doesn't go away, or feeling that something is caught in the throat
- Difficulty or pain with chewing or swallowing
- A swelling of the jaw that causes dentures to fit poorly or become uncomfortable
- A change in voice
- Ear pain

The Oral Cancer Screening

An oral cancer screening is quick and painless, and only takes a few minutes. It can be performed by your dentist at your routine dental exam. Here's what you can expect during an oral cancer screening:

- You will be asked to remove any dentures or partials if you have them.
- The dentist will inspect your face, neck, lips, and mouth to look for visible signs of oral cancer.
- He or she will feel the area under your jaw and the sides of your neck with both hands to check for the lumps that may indicate cancer.
- The dentist will then inspect the insides of your lips and cheeks for the red or white patches that could indicate cancer.
- You will be asked to stick out your tongue so it can be checked for swelling, discoloration, or abnormal texture.
- Using gauze, the dentist will gently pull your tongue to one side and then the other, allowing him or her to check for cancer underneath or at the tongue's base.
- The dentist will also inspect your throat, as well as the roof and floor of your mouth.
- Finally, the dentist will put one finger on the floor of your mouth and another hand under your chin and press down to check for lumps or sensitivity.