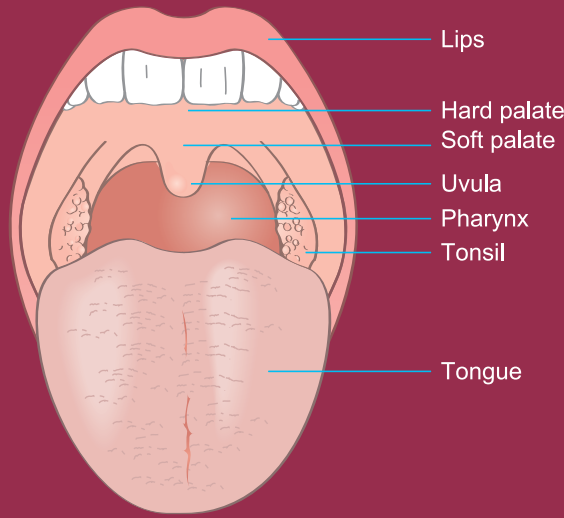


Cancer is a broad term used to describe a group of more than 200 types of disease that affect different areas of the body. Research has shown that many types of cancer are linked to our diet and lifestyle, which means there are steps we can take to help prevent them. This leaflet is about reducing your risk of mouth and throat cancer.

What is mouth and throat cancer?

Mouth and throat cancer refers to cancers of the tongue, lips, gums, tonsils, lining of the mouth and upper part of the throat. The throat, also known as the pharynx, leads down from the nose and mouth to the voicebox (larynx).



Mouth and throat cancers are caused by damaged cells, which can grow uncontrollably to form a tumour. Through using tobacco and by drinking alcohol the mouth and throat are directly exposed to cancer-causing agents (carcinogens). The main causes of mouth and throat cancer are tobacco and alcohol.

After not smoking or chewing tobacco and not drinking alcohol, there are several lifestyle choices we can make to reduce our risk of developing mouth and throat cancer.

Who is most at risk?

There were nearly 5,000 new cases of mouth and throat cancer diagnosed in the UK in 2005. The rates of this cancer are increasing and it is **twice** as common in men than women.



As with all cancers, the risk of developing mouth and throat cancer depends on a number of factors and varies from person to person. **People who use tobacco, betel nut or paan, and/or drink alcohol are most at risk.**

It has been estimated that by not smoking or drinking alcohol, and choosing a healthy diet, more than two-thirds of mouth and throat cancers could be prevented.

Lifestyle risk factors

- Smoking, and other use of and exposure to, tobacco
- Drinking alcohol
- Having a diet low in vegetables and fruits
- Like most cancers, mouth and throat cancer mainly affects older people, so if you are 40 years or over, you are more likely to develop the disease
- Exposure to Human Papillomavirus (HPV), which can be transmitted through oral sex, may also be a risk factor for mouth and throat cancer



While drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco are both independent causes, the risk of mouth and throat cancer is greater if you smoke **and** drink alcohol.

If any of these apply to you, it does not mean that you will develop mouth and throat cancer – it just means that your risk may be higher than average. The important thing to remember is that you can make positive lifestyle changes at any age to help reduce your risk.

Reducing your risk

In 2007, we published an Expert Report on preventing cancer. This reviewed the findings of over 7,000 scientific studies on food, nutrition, physical activity and body weight in relation to cancer prevention.

The Report looked at 17 different cancer sites, and found that there are steps we can all take to reduce our risk of mouth and throat cancer. Making healthy lifestyle choices, like not smoking or drinking alcohol, and choosing a healthy diet, can have a big effect on our chances of developing the disease. These are the key things we can do to reduce our risk:



Do not smoke or chew tobacco



Limit alcoholic drinks

There is strong scientific evidence that alcohol increases the risk of mouth and throat cancer, so for cancer prevention, we recommend not to drink alcoholic drinks. If you do drink alcohol, limit your consumption to **no more than 2 drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women.**



Choose a healthy diet

Try to include more vegetables and fruits in your diet. Evidence shows that **vegetables and fruits** probably protect against cancers of the mouth and throat, so we should aim for at least five portions of a variety of different types each day.

As part of a healthy diet we should also include wholegrains and pulses (such as beans and lentils), which contain fibre and other nutrients.



Symptoms to look out for

If you are worried about any of these symptoms and if they last longer than **three weeks**, visit your doctor or dentist. They are likely to be caused by other less serious conditions, but it's important to have a check up.

- an ulcer or sore in your mouth or on your tongue
- red or white patches in your mouth
- a pain in your head or neck area
- an unexplained lump in your mouth or neck
- a sore or painful throat
- hoarseness or difficulty swallowing, especially in smokers aged over 40 and heavy drinkers

Early detection

As with most cancers, survival rates can be significantly improved by early detection and diagnosis. It is important to check occasionally for any of the changes mentioned above. Early signs of mouth and throat cancer do not always cause discomfort or pain.

Check for any changes in the following areas:

- ◆ tongue
- ◆ gums
- ◆ lining of your cheeks
- ◆ lips
- ◆ under your tongue
- ◆ roof of your mouth



As part of your routine check up, your dentist is able to examine you for any early warning signs. Dentists are often the first to spot these and will refer patients with suspect changes to hospital for further tests.

It's a good idea to visit the dentist regularly, even if you no longer have your own teeth. If you are over 40, smoke, chew tobacco or betel nut or drink heavily, ask your dentist to check your mouth **at least** once a year.

Finding out more

WCRF UK also provides information on reducing the risk of other cancers – as well as practical advice on **choosing a balanced diet, being physically active** and **maintaining a healthy weight**.

Research shows that about a third of the most common cancers could be prevented by making healthy choices in these three areas.

Visit www.wcrf-uk.org or call us on **020 7343 4205** to find out more.

If you want more information on the detection and treatment of mouth and throat cancer (or other cancers), we recommend contacting Macmillan Cancer Support. Visit their website, www.macmillan.org.uk, or call 0808 808 2020.



Getting involved!

There are many ways you can support the work of WCRF UK. Visit www.wcrf-uk.org/fundraising or call our fundraising team on **020 7343 4200** to find out more.

About WCRF UK

WCRF UK is the principal UK charity dedicated to the prevention of cancer through the promotion of healthy diet and nutrition, physical activity and weight management. WCRF UK is committed to providing cancer research and education programmes which expand our understanding of the importance of our food and lifestyle choices in the cancer process.

By spreading the good news that cancer can be prevented, WCRF UK hopes that many thousands of lives will be saved. The education and research programmes of WCRF UK are funded almost entirely by donations from the public.

This leaflet gives information based on WCRF UK's Recommendations for Cancer Prevention developed from the Expert Report: *Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective* (2007). The Report, produced by WCRF/AICR, is the largest study of its kind ever published and its Recommendations are based on the most comprehensive review of all the available evidence. WCRF UK is committed to interpreting scientific research in the field of food, nutrition, physical activity, and cancer prevention and to translating the results into meaningful and practical advice for the public to follow.

Did you know that many cases of cancer could be prevented? For practical information on choosing a healthy diet, managing your weight and becoming more active to help reduce your risk, visit our website:

www.wcrf-uk.org



WCRF UK Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

- 1 Be as lean as possible without becoming underweight
- 2 Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day
- 3 Avoid sugary drinks. Limit consumption of energy-dense foods (particularly processed foods high in added sugar, or low in fibre, or high in fat)
- 4 Eat more of a variety of vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, and pulses such as beans
- 5 Limit consumption of red meats (such as beef, pork and lamb) and avoid processed meats
- 6 If consumed at all, limit alcoholic drinks to 2 for men and 1 for women a day
- 7 Limit consumption of salty foods and foods processed with salt (sodium)
- 8 Don't use supplements to protect against cancer

Special Population Recommendations

- 9 It is best for mothers to breastfeed exclusively for up to 6 months and then add other liquids and foods
- 10 After treatment, cancer survivors should follow the Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

And, always remember – do not smoke or chew tobacco

WCRF UK is part of the WCRF global network
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“Stopping cancer before it starts”

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REDUCING YOUR RISK OF MOUTH AND THROAT CANCER

