

# What to Expect from an Oral Cancer Exam



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# The Oral Cancer Exam

An oral cancer exam is painless and quick—it takes only a few minutes. Your regular dental check-up is an excellent opportunity to have the exam.

Here's what to expect during your regular check-up:

- If you have dentures or partials you will be asked to remove them.
- Your dentist will inspect your face, neck, lips and mouth to look for signs of cancer.
- With both hands he or she will feel the area under your jaw and the side of your neck, checking for lumps that may suggest cancer.
- He or she will then look at and feel the insides of your lips and cheeks to check for possible signs of cancer, such as red and/or white patches.
- Your dentist will have you stick out your tongue so it can be checked for swelling or abnormal color or texture.
- Using gauze, he or she will gently pull your tongue to one side, then the other to check the base of your tongue. The underside of your tongue will also be checked.
- In addition, he or she will look at the roof and floor of your mouth, as well as the back of your throat.
- Finally, your dentist will put one finger on the floor of your mouth and with the other hand under your chin, gently press down to check for lumps or sensitivity.

We know that all cancers result from changes in genes which control cell behaviors. Cancer occurs when cells become abnormal and divide without control or order. Oral cancer usually occurs in people over the age of 45 but can develop at any age. Some symptoms to watch for are:

- A sore on the lip or in the mouth that does not heal;
- A lump on the lip or in the mouth or throat;
- A white or red patch on the gums, tongue, or lining of the mouth;
- Unusual bleeding, pain, or numbness in the mouth;
- A sore throat that does not go away, or a feeling that something is caught in the throat;
- Difficulty or pain with chewing or swallowing;
- Swelling of the jaw that causes dentures to fit poorly or become uncomfortable;
- A change in your voice; and/or
- Pain in the ear.

These symptoms may be caused by cancer or by some other less serious problem. It is important to see a dentist or doctor about any symptoms like these, so that the problem can be diagnosed and treated as early as possible.

