

# Smilematters

## PATIENT FACT SHEET

### The Keys to Oral Cancer Prevention

Although the rate of oral cancer has decreased in the last 20 years, more than 30,000 Americans will be diagnosed with it this year, and almost 8,000 individuals die annually from it.

In most cases, this disease will strike people over the age of 40. For this reason, the Michigan Dental Association wants to remind adults to schedule regular dental visits and adopt an oral cancer prevention lifestyle.

As is the case with many other cancers, early detection can improve the chances of successful treatment. As part of your regular examination, the dentist can check your oral tissues for signs of cancerous or potentially cancerous lesions.

Adults also can take an active role in detecting oral cancer early by checking their oral tissues — lips, gums, cheek lining, tongue, as well as the floor and roof of the mouth — for symptoms of the disease. If you notice any of these symptoms, contact their dentist immediately for a professional examination.

In addition to age, other factors can increase the risk of developing oral cancer. Not surprisingly, oral cancers are more likely to strike people who use tobacco products, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes, and smokeless tobacco. The risk of developing oral cancer also seems to rise with heavy alcohol consumption (30 or more drinks per week). Regular, prolonged exposure to the sun may also increase the risk of lip cancer. However, it's the combination of tobacco use and heavy alcohol consumption that triggers oral cancer in an estimated 75 percent of cases. Besides avoiding risk factors, adults may be able to reduce the potential for oral cancer by adopting healthy eating habits. Some researchers suggest that a diet high in fruits and vegetables can help prevent the development of potentially cancerous lesions.

#### Oral Cancer Warning Signs

Early detection can improve your chances for successful treatment of oral cancer. Here are some warning signs to look for:

- A sore that bleeds easily or does not heal.
- A color change of the oral tissues.
- A lump, thickening, rough spot, crust or small eroded area.
- Pain, tenderness, or numbness anywhere in the mouth or on the lips.
- Difficulty chewing, swallowing, speaking, or moving the jaw or tongue.
- A change in the way that teeth fit together.

Knowing the risk factors and taking steps to prevent potentially cancerous lesions from developing can go a long way toward limiting the influence oral cancer can have on your life. Starting today, make it a point to reduce your oral cancer risk factors.

Task an active role in your oral health, including:

- be alert to any changes in the tissues in your mouth;
- stop habits that can cause cancer, primarily tobacco and alcohol use;
- visit your dentist regularly for check-ups and oral cancer screenings.