



### Checking your mouth

From time to time, spend a few moments in front of the mirror looking in your mouth. Check your tongue, gums, lining of your cheeks, lips, under your tongue and the roof of your mouth. But remember your dentist can easily check the parts you cannot see.

### Your dentist can help

Dentists have training to help them identify health problems in the mouth and are often the first to spot something unusual in their patients. As part of a regular examination, dentists check for the early warning signs of mouth cancer. If they notice anything unusual, they will refer patients to hospital for further tests.

If you are over 40, smoke, chew tobacco or betel nut or drink alcohol, ask your dentist to check your mouth once a year. It is important to visit the dentist regularly even if you no longer have your own teeth.

### Further information

For more about screening and the signs and symptoms of cancer visit [www.spotcancerearly.com](http://www.spotcancerearly.com)

For more about cancer visit our patient information website [www.cancerhelp.org.uk](http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk)

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our information nurses on freephone **0808 800 4040**.

Our health messages are based on scientific evidence. Find out more at [www.cancerresearchuk.org/health](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health)

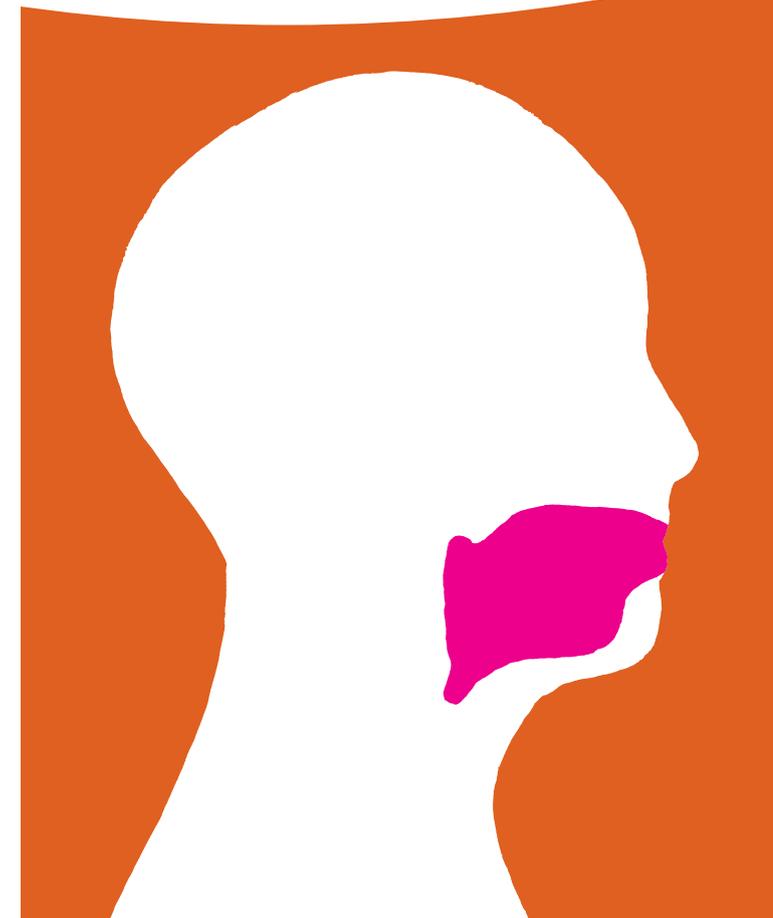
All our leaflets are thoroughly researched and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. They are reviewed externally by independent experts and updated regularly. You can order our full range of leaflets free online at [www.cancerresearchuk.org/leaflets](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/leaflets)

### About Cancer Research UK

Cancer Research UK is the world's leading charity dedicated to research into the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer. If you would like to support our work, please call **020 7121 6699** or visit our website [www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

*Together we will beat cancer*

# Detecting mouth cancer and how to reduce your risk





## Mouth cancer facts

Mouth cancer can develop in any part of the mouth including the tongue, gums, tonsils, lining of the mouth, lips and upper part of the throat.

The early signs of mouth cancer can often be seen. When changes are found early, treatment is easier and is more likely to be successful. This leaflet tells you about the changes to look out for and how you can reduce your risk of developing mouth cancer.

### What increases your risk?

#### Age and gender

Mouth cancer is more common in men than women and is rare in people under 40.

#### HPV infection

Infection with HPV (human papillomavirus), a common sexually transmitted disease, can increase mouth cancer risk.

### What reduces your risk?

#### Being a non-smoker

Smoking cigarettes, cigars or pipes can all increase the risk of mouth cancer. Smokers are three times more likely to develop mouth cancer than non-smokers.

#### Avoiding tobacco and betel nut

People who chew tobacco or betel nut are at higher risk of developing mouth cancer.

If you smoke or chew tobacco or betel nut, the best thing you can do is to stop completely. Help is available – talk to your doctor, call **Quitline** on **0800 002200** or **Asian Quitline** on **0800 002288**.

#### Cutting down on alcohol

The more you cut down on alcohol, the more you reduce your risk of mouth cancer. But there is limited risk if you only drink a little, such as one small drink a day for women or two small drinks a day for men.

For help and advice on how to reduce your drinking, visit [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk) or see your doctor.

**People who use tobacco and drink a lot of alcohol have the highest risk of mouth cancer. Many mouth cancers are caused this way.**

#### Eating healthily

Eating a diet which is high in fruit and vegetables may help to reduce the risk of mouth cancer. Try to eat at least five portions every day. Choosing a variety of different-coloured fruits and vegetables will help you get a broad range of vitamins and minerals.

### What should I look out for?

Look for the following changes. They may not be painful but you should still see your doctor or dentist if they last longer than three weeks.

#### Look out for:

- an ulcer or sore in your mouth or on your tongue
- a red or white patch in your mouth
- an unexplained pain in your mouth or ear.

#### Other signs to look out for are:

- an unexplained lump in your neck
- a sore or painful throat
- a croaky voice or difficulty swallowing.

Lumps and ulcers in the mouth are very common and usually get better on their own. But changes that last longer than three weeks could be serious and should be reported to your doctor or dentist without delay. **Early detection saves lives.**