

Editorial Article

## Early signs & symptoms of Oral cancer

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The overall 5-year survival rate of oral and oropharyngeal cancers is 65%. 5-year survival rate provides you data about what percentage of people live at least 5years after the detection of cancer. The 5-year survival rate of oral and oropharyngeal cancer rises to 84% when detected early. Here lies the importance of routine check-ups, because otherwise, it may remain undetected for a long time.

But don't panic right away, ***many oral lesions can be precancerous or maybe the warning signs of oral cancer, but that does not mean every lesion is so.***

The following description may help you differentiate: -

### **1. A lip sore:-**

- A lip sore or a mouth ulcer that doesn't show signs of healing for more than 3 weeks
- Most patients with mouth cancer have this symptom
- But rarely it is an initial symptom of oral cancer

### **2. A white or reddish patch:-**

- White or reddish patches anywhere inside the mouth, which are not painful, swollen, or bleeding.
- They are not caused due to cancer but are precancerous lesions, which if left untreated may convert into cancer

### **3. Unexplained persistent growth or lump in your mouth or the neck:-**

A large, painless lump, especially the one that is continuously growing in size or has been there for more than 2 weeks, might be a warning sign of cancer. But lumps in the neck don't necessarily mean cancer. Lumps may be caused due to swollen lymph nodes which can be caused by the following:-

- By common infections such as cold, sore throat, etc
- Ear infection

The lymph nodes which are swollen due to infection return to their normal size after the infection is treated.

### **4. Painful or difficult swallowing, speaking or chewing**

Difficulty in swallowing is a common symptom of head and neck cancer. Difficulty in chewing is especially a sign of oral or oropharyngeal cancers. Difficulty in swallowing or chewing can also be the side-effect of the treatment of such cancers.

Other causes of difficulty in swallowing include:-

- any disease where the nervous system is affected, such as a stroke, head injury, or dementia
- gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) – a condition in which gastric acid leaks back up into the food pipe.

### **5. Difficulty moving your jaw**

Difficulty in moving the jaw is mostly accompanied by difficulty in speech and swallowing.

### **6. Loosening of one or more teeth without reason**

The sudden displacement of the tooth from its position or sudden loosening of the teeth may be caused by an underlying tumour.

**7. Hoarseness of voice:-**

Hoarseness of voice for more than 3 weeks can be a sign of laryngeal cancer.

But there can be other common causes of hoarseness in the voice like:-

- Viral/bacterial laryngitis
- Voice abuse- usually in persons who speak a lot
- Smoke exposure
- Gastroesophageal reflux- a condition where gastric acid comes up to the food pipe and irritates the vocal cords.

**8. Prolonged numbness or pain in any area of the mouth:-**

This happens when the cancer cells have caused damage to the nerves and blood vessels of the mouth.

Other causes of numbness of the mouth may include:-

- Vitamin deficiency
- Low blood sugar
- Allergic reaction
- Burning mouth syndrome
- Paraesthesia after dental treatment- because of the involvement of inferior alveolar nerve during dental treatment
- Seizures etc

**9. Swelling of the jaw:-**

This may indicate a tumour in the jaw bone

**10. Bleeding in the mouth:-**

This is one of the symptoms for oral cancer.

**11. Ear pain:-**

Ear problem is a less common symptom of oral cancer, its symptoms are as follows:-

- Radiating ear ache up to the jaw and cheeks
- Ear gives a feeling of fullness
- Ringing in the ear

***Who is at more risk?***

- Who is older than 55?
- who use tobacco of any kind, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes, chewing tobacco and snuff, etc?
- Who consume alcohol in excess- People who have more than 3.5 alcoholic drinks per day increase their risk of oral cavity cancers two to three times, according to the National Institutes of Health?
- If you smoke along with drinking alcohol it increases the risk multiple times.
- Infected by a sexually transmitted virus called human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Who has an immune system that has been weakened by some drugs?
- Suffer from skin diseases like lichen planus, graft-versus-host disease (GVHD), or some inherited blood conditions.

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