

YOUR HEALTH

SYMPTOMS: HOW YOUR DENTIST CAN DETECT EARLY SIGNS OF THIS DEADLY DISEASE

The incidence of oral cancer in the United Kingdom has increased by more than 75 per cent in the past 30 years. Here, Dr Adam Patel discusses what precautionary measures can be taken to help prevent oral cancer and how to detect the early signs.

Q What is cancer?

A Cancer is a term used to describe diseases in which an abnormal group of cells within the body divide without control and are able to invade other tissues. Cancer cells can spread to other parts of the body through the blood and lymphatic systems.

Q What is oral cancer?

A Oral cancer is an umbrella term encompassing the various cancers that can develop within the vicinity of the mouth. Cancer can develop in numerous structures related to the mouth, including the lips, tongue, cheeks, jawbone, gums, floor of the mouth, hard and soft palate, sinuses and the pharynx (throat).

Q Are some people more likely to develop oral cancer than others?

A Within the UK, more than 6,000 new cases of oral cancer are diagnosed annually, accounting for about two per cent of all cancers. Men are generally more at risk of developing oral cancer than women, while the overall risks increase with age.

Q Can oral cancer affect young adults as well as the elderly?

A Yes. In the UK between 2008 and 2010, an average of 44 per cent of cases were diagnosed in men and women aged 65 and over and almost half - 49 per cent - were diagnosed in those aged between 45 and 64.

Q What are the symptoms of oral cancer?



A Below is a non-exhaustive list of common symptoms of oral cancer. Please note the following symptoms can also occur with various other conditions and are not always indicative of oral cancer.

However, if you are experiencing any of the symptoms, you should see your dentist.

■ One or more ulcers in your mouth that do not heal. Ulcers

that remain for over three weeks should be examined.

■ An unexplained swelling in your mouth that lasts for more than three weeks.

■ The development of white, red or speckled (white and red) patches in the mouth.

■ Unexplained numbness, loss of feeling or pain in any area of the face, mouth or neck.

■ A persistent lump in the

neck due to an enlarged lymph node.

■ Difficulty chewing or swallowing, speaking or moving the jaw or tongue.

■ Dramatic weight loss.

Q What are the causes of oral cancer?

A Oral cancer occurs when something goes wrong with

the normal cell lifecycle, leading to the abnormal group of cells growing and reproducing uncontrollably.

Risk factors for developing mouth cancer include:

- Smoking.
- Chewing betel nut (paan).
- Drinking alcohol.
- Users of snuff or dip.
- Individuals who combine smoking and drinking alcohol

are at an increased risk of developing oral cancer by 20-fold.

■ Infection with human papilloma virus - usually transmitted by oral sex.

■ Poor diet.

Q How is oral cancer diagnosed?

A As part of your routine dental examination, your dentist will conduct an oral cancer screening examination. More specifically, your dentist will feel for any lumps or irregular tissue changes in your mouth.

When examining your mouth, your dentist will look for any sores or abnormal-looking tissue as well as checking for any of the above-mentioned signs and symptoms.

If the tissue looks more suspicious, your dentist may recommend a biopsy.

This procedure usually requires a referral to the hospital.

These tests are necessary to detect and confirm the presence or absence of oral cancer or various other oral conditions.

Q Are the effects and life-expectancy from all oral cancers the same?

A No. The prognosis (overall outlook) is substantially influenced by how early the cancer is diagnosed.

Once the tumour is removed and the cells are analysed, we have a better idea of the size of the cancer, whether it has spread into any surrounding organs or into the lymph nodes.

The earlier the cancer is diagnosed, the less chance of it spreading into surrounding tissues.

Therefore, it is imperative to ensure you regularly attend dental check-ups, even after you are rendered edentulous - have no natural teeth remaining in your mouth.

Meet the man with the answers on oral health issues

THE Leicester Mercury has teamed up with Leicestershire dentist Dr Adam Patel (pictured) to help readers with any dental and oral health problems they might have.

People are invited to send in any questions and Dr Patel will answer a selection of them through a regular column in the Leicester Mercury's Monday health section.

Dr Patel said: "I hope I will be able to help people with information and advice which they can put into practice."

"My experience in seeing patients is

that there is quite a lack of dental and oral health information and education.

"Your mouth is the start of your digestive system and people often don't realise there is a distinct link between oral and general health."

"It can also have a big impact on a person's psychological and social wellbeing. Bad oral health is very visible and can impact on aspects of life, from a person's personal life to getting a job."

Dr Patel, who was educated at City of Leicester School and Sixth Form

College, said: "I hope I will be able to help readers with the information I provide."

Dr Patel's replies should only be used as a reference - he is not a replacement for your own dentist.

If you have a query you would like to raise, please summarise it in about 200 words and e-mail it to the address below.

Put "health questions" in the subject line.

Alternatively, send your 200-word summary to Cathy Buss, Health Questions, Leicester Mercury,

St George Street, Leicester, LE1 9FG. Please note, an edited version of the information you send us might appear on this page.

Please include a contact name and phone number in case we have any queries about your submission.

These details will not be published.

Dr Patel will not be able to send personal responses to letters.

E-mail:

catherinebuss@leicestermercury.co.uk



■ Have you struggled with a difficult health problem? We want to tell your story. Contact health correspondent Cathy Buss on 0116 222 4261, e-mail catherinebuss@leicestermercury.co.uk