

Men twice as likely to develop oral cancer

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Credit: Cancer Research UK

Men are more than twice as likely as women to develop oral cancer, according to new figures released by Cancer Research UK.

The latest data shows around 5,300 men are diagnosed with oral cancer every year in the UK compared to around 2,500 women.

The data also reveals oral cancer is more often diagnosed in men at a younger age compared with other cancers. Oral cancer is the 11th most common male cancer overall, but among men aged 45 – 59 it is the fourth most common.

Oral cancer includes cancers of the mouth, tongue, lips, tonsils and the middle part of the throat (oropharynx).

Around nine out of 10 oral cancer cases in the UK are linked to preventable causes like smoking, alcohol and contracting human papillomavirus (HPV). The difference between cases in men and women may be due to men indulging more heavily in some of these activities. For example, there are higher smoking rates in men and an estimated 70 per cent of male oral and pharyngeal cancers in the UK are linked to tobacco smoking.

Cases of oral cancer have been going up in both

men and women over the last decade, with rates rising from 10 cases per 100,000 people a year in the mid-2000s, to 13 cases per 100,000 today.

Mike Donoghue, 57, from County Durham, was diagnosed by his GP with [mouth cancer](#) 10 years ago after discovering a lump in his neck while shaving. Following his diagnosis, Mike had surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Mike said: "I had heard about lung cancer, liver cancer, [stomach cancer](#), bowel cancer. But I didn't realise there was a thing called mouth cancer. It was shocking news. I had noticed something unusual before I felt anything, but I thought it was just a muscle. By the time I went to get it checked out, the lump was quite large - about the size of a golf ball. I would encourage anyone who notices something that's not normal for them to get it checked out as soon as possible."

Symptoms to look out for include ulcers that do not heal, a lump in your neck, lip or mouth, white or red patches in the mouth, and/or difficulty swallowing.

To help tackle the rise in oral cancer, Cancer Research UK offers a free online educational resource for dentists and GPs to help them to spot the disease earlier, supported by the British Dental Association.

The Oral Cancer Recognition Toolkit includes information on what to look out for, how to refer patients for further tests and how to prevent the disease.

It has already been accessed by over 25,000 dentists and GPs across the UK.

Dr Richard Roope, Cancer Research UK's lead GP, said: "It's a real concern that so many men are getting oral cancer and that it's been on the rise in both men and women. But the vast majority of oral [cancer](#) cases are preventable, so the good news is that people can cut their risk by quitting smoking and cutting down on alcohol. It's also vital that

everyone knows what their mouth tongue and gums usually feel like so they can spot anything out of the ordinary. Early diagnosis is absolutely key for the best results which is why we're set on helping dentists and GPs catch [oral cancer](#) sooner."

Nick Stolls, Harleston-based dentist from the British Dental Association, said: "Having referred patients with suspected oral cancers, I know that the earlier it's spotted and diagnosed the better the chances are for successful treatment. So it's crucial that dentists and GPs know the signs to look out for and that patients bring anything suspicious to their attention as soon as possible. This is why it's also important to visit your dentist for regular check-ups so that anything out of the ordinary can be picked up and referred quickly."

More information: Dentist's toolkit:
www.doctors.net.uk/oct

Physician's toolkit: www.m3medical.com/oct

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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