

Be aware of the danger which is posed by mouth cancers

ACCORDING to the NHS, mouth cancer is where a tumour develops in a part of the mouth. It may be on the surface of the tongue, inside the cheeks, on the roof of the mouth (palate), the lips or gums. If you haven't heard much about mouth cancer, you're not alone. One worrying statistic is that although 88% of the British public have heard of mouth cancer, 75% do not know what the main signs and symptoms are.

If you want to find out more visit the Oral Health Foundation (OHF) mouth cancer action month page. According to the OHF, it actually kills more people per year than cervical and testicular cancer combined, so it really is important.

Early diagnosis is critical. Dental-health.org suggests that "with early diagnosis, the chances of surviving mouth cancer are nine out of 10" - so it figures that you need to know what to look out for.

Signs and symptoms include:
 ■ Ulcers or soreness in the mouth or on the lips that do not heal within three weeks;
 ■ Lumps or swellings in the mouth, neck or head area;

November is Mouth Cancer Action Month - but just what kind of action are we taking about? Here, dental hygienist Alison Lowe explains the key signs, symptoms and causes of mouth cancer to help people spot it early



- Red and white patches in the mouth;
- A red patch that becomes crusty and itchy;
- Unexplained loose teeth, bleeding or sockets that do not heal after extractions;
- Persistent numbness or an odd feeling on the lip or tongue.

If you notice any of these, then make an appointment at your dental practice or doctors. One of the most important things you can do to reduce your risk of late diagnosis is to attend regular appointments with your dental professional as they are trained to detect signs of mouth cancer.

If you have had difficulty accessing

your dental practice following the pandemic, then spend two minutes watching the Oral Health Foundation's self-assessment video demonstrating how to carry out a mouth cancer check on yourself at home.

Obviously, this is no substitute for professional medical care, but it can help you spot any early signs.

Of particular concern is lip cancer. This is currently included with other forms of mouth cancer but there are calls for it to be regarded as a distinct cancer site. Approximately a third of lip cancers are associated with excessive sun exposure in patients, so you could be excused for thinking that we do not need to worry in the UK. How-

ever, while the incidence of lip cancer is fairly low, that does not mean it is non-existent. Indeed, the risk is going to increase, compounded by climate change, including ozone depletion, global warming, and air pollution.

We have also recently noticed a change in behaviour following Covid with people taking up new hobbies such as running, walking, cycling, gardening and water sports, all leading to greater exposure to UV radiation.

Because of this the Fit-Lip campaign was founded both to continue raising awareness of the condition and encourage the use of SPF lip balm to protect the lips.

"If in doubt, get checked out" is the catchy slogan from the Oral Health Foundation, and it needs to be memorable because even though cases of mouth and lip cancer are rising rapidly compared with 10 years ago, public knowledge is dangerously low.

The good news is that there are many lifestyle choices you can make to reduce your risk of developing it. The NHS advises that the leading causes of mouth cancer in the UK are tobacco and alcohol.

If you drink more than is recom-

mended or smoke at all then you are increasing your risk. The Oral Health Foundation reports that up to 90% of all mouth cancers are linked to lifestyle factors, and that smoking can increase your risk by up to 10 times. There is a right time to quit smoking, and it's now.

Other risk factors that increase the likelihood of developing mouth cancer include:

- Chewing tobacco or other smokeless tobacco products;
- Chewing betel nuts with or without added tobacco;
- An unhealthy diet;
- The human papillomavirus (HPV);
- Sunlight.

With mouth and lip cancer cases rising, it's never too late to change your lifestyle for the better.

So be vigilant in checking for changes in your mouth and on your lips, decrease your risk factors if you can, keep your smoothest muscle fit by wearing SPF lip balm and ensure you make and attend regular appointments with your dental professional.

Be mouth cancer aware and share your knowledge to help others - and "if in doubt, get checked out".

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With magic in the air, friends and family all around and a great excuse to have that extra piece of chocolate, Christmas is the most special time of year for many people. That's not to say it's not without its legwork. With decorations to hang and little ones to be kept entertained, it can be a lot of effort and expense before getting to the fun stuff! So we are here with a helping hand. This is your chance to win a share of our £25,000 Dream Christmas giveaway. 10 lucky readers will win £2500 each in time for Christmas!!!

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